

BOOBSLANG:
A LEXICOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE ARGOT OF NEW ZEALAND
PRISON INMATES, IN THE PERIOD 1996 – 2000

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy in English
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Diana M. F. Looser

University of Canterbury

2001

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**Dedicated to my father,
Alan Looser (1948 – 1995)**

and

**Vanessa Lamont,
for her help with the initial study
that led to the writing of this thesis.**

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1 ABSTRACT

Boobslang, or the argot of New Zealand prison inmates, is a form of language unique to prisons and criminal subcultures. Although prison argot is a linguistic feature of most prison communities worldwide, boobslang is a specific New Zealand variety. With its origins in sixteenth century British cant, boobslang is an extension of the underworld varieties that developed in Britain, America and Australia. Individual terms were first recorded in New Zealand in the late nineteenth century and the argot started to develop an indigenous flavour during the first half of the twentieth century. Brief glossaries have been published occasionally since the 1940s.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first part provides a sociological and lexicological context for boobslang, discussing the nature of the prison community in New Zealand; the prison as both a total institution and an antisociety: that is, a separate, resistant world requiring resocialisation of the inmate; and boobslang as an antilanguage generated by that antisociety, and the vehicle of the inmate's resocialisation in the prison environment. The specific functions of boobslang within the prison environment are also considered, as are the characteristics of the New Zealand variety of boobslang; the differences between boobslang use in men's and women's prisons; and the historical development of underworld varieties of language that have given rise to the boobslang used by contemporary inmates.

The second and larger part of the thesis presents data gathered by interview with inmates in all of New Zealand's prisons. This takes the form of a full-length lexicon of boobslang, containing approximately 3,000 entries. The lexicon provides information about headword, definition, etymology and origins, together with citations from New Zealand literature, and extensive cultural notes covering such subjects as the drug culture, gangs, and prison policy and procedure.

This thesis contains the first comprehensive lexicographical study of New Zealand prison argot. It makes a contribution to historical lexicography by recording the speech habits of New Zealand prison inmates at the end of the twentieth century.

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere thanks to

Associate Professor Tony Deverson, Department of English, University of Canterbury; Associate Professor Elizabeth Gordon, Department of Linguistics, University of Canterbury; Prison Officers at Rolleston Prison; Mary Wilson, Acting Site Manager, Christchurch Women's Prison; Cecelia Lashlie, Manager, Christchurch Women's Prison; Chief Inspector John Coomber, Christchurch Police; Detective Senior Sergeant Paul Kench, Criminal Investigating Branch, Christchurch (Region 5) Drug Squad; Paul Monk, Department of Corrections Regional Manager for Canterbury; Joanne Roskilley, Executive Assistant to Paul Monk; Paul Rushton and Tom Moore at Paparua (Christchurch Men's) Prison; Wayne McKnight, Unit Manager of Tirohanga-Paeroa Unit, Paparua Prison; Ray Mason, Unit Manager of Paparua South Unit, Paparua Prison; Ian Taylor, Department of Corrections Regional Manager for Otago/Southland; Mike Anderson, Site Manager, Dunedin Prison; Debbie Scarlett, Client Services Manager, Invercargill Prison; Robyn Mulligan, Education Co-ordinator, Invercargill Prison; Phil Lister, Prison Officer and Archivist, Invercargill Prison; John Aldridge, Site Manager, Wellington (Mount Crawford) Prison; Janey Bowen, Acting Site Manager, Wellington Prison; Alison Welsh and Keriana Whittaker from the Department of Corrections Communications Unit, Head Office, Wellington; Fleur Grenfell, Site Manager, Arohata Women's Prison; Miriam Letoa, Manager, Arohata Women's Prison; Dorreen MacKenzie, Site Manager, Rimutaka Prison; Shaaron Benefield, Executive Assistant to the Regional Manager for North Island West Coast; Iria Pene and Mrs Savage, Manawatu (Linton) Prison; Winston Powell, Site Manager, Wanganui (Kaitoke) Prison; Kelly Gnida, Wanganui Prison; Greg Harris, Site Manager, New Plymouth Prison; Novena McGuckin, Unit Manager Te Tumu Whakahaere Wahanga (Māori Focus Unit), New Plymouth Prison; Prisoners' Aid and Rehabilitation Society (PARS) for access to Addington Prison; Walker Manaena, Site Manager, Hawke's Bay (Mangaroa) Prison; Reg Christiansen, Regional Manager, Central North Island; Gaylene Quinton, Personal Assistant to Reg Christiansen; Bob Sweet, Site Manager, Tongariro/Rangipo Prison; Iria Pene, Site Manager, Ohura Prison; Peter Madsen, Unit Manager, Ohura Prison; Margaret Fairhall, Prison Nurse, Ohura Prison; Harry Hawthorn, Regional Manager, Bay of Plenty; Gayle Dickie, Personal Assistant to Harry Hawthorn; Dianne Brophy, Acting Client Services Manager, Waikeria (Waikato/Bay of Plenty Regional) Prison; Robyn Horton, Librarian, Department of Corrections/Public Prisons Service Head Office Information Centre; Caroline Cole, Department of Corrections Head Office Information Centre; Bret Bestic, Regional Manager, Auckland; Brigid Bradley, Site Manager, Mount Eden Prison; Deborah Bradley, Operations Advisor, Mount Eden Prison; Lynnette Stankovich, Manager, Mount Eden Women's Prison; Jim van Rensburg, Sentence Manager, Auckland (Paremoremo) Prison; Dave Connor, Chaplain and Acting Client Services Manager, Auckland Prison; Anne, Social Worker, Auckland Prison; Kathy Dunstall, spokesperson for The Howard League for Penal Reform (NZ); Bernadette Bradley, Corrections Officer, Paparua Prison; and the men and women in prisons throughout New Zealand who contributed to the study, without whose help this project would not have been possible.

In addition, I would like to thank

Mum, for her kind words of encouragement and support; Grandma, for her wisdom and her company; my brothers, Colin and Julian, the computer genii in my life, who copied and saved and sorted and formatted and scanned and converted and salvaged and printed everything that I asked them to; Brad Crampton, for helping me chill out and making me laugh; Brad's mum, Pam, for feeding me; all the friends and relatives around New Zealand who let me stay with them during my research trips; my office mates, Aaron 'Grubb' Bell, Andrew 'Handy-Andy' Taylor-Perry, Emily Faith, Jane Marshall, Rachelle C'Ailceta, and Julia Allen; my friends Fran Eathorne, Dagny Baltakmens and Andrea Westmerland; and Kitzên, my cat.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO BOOBSLANG

Boobslang is the argot of New Zealand prison inmates. The term **boobslang**, from **boob** (prison) + ‘slang,’ has been coined by inmates to describe their unique form of expression, also sometimes referred to as **boob talk** or **boob jargon**. Boobslang has developed due to the inmates’ segregation from mainstream society and their close and continued association with each other in relatively constant and controlled circumstances. This form of language reveals the strong in-group identity and psychological distinctiveness of the prison subculture. Colourful, opaque, darkly comic and often obscene, boobslang provides the opportunity for frivolous, creative language play, but at the same time is an integral component in the creation and maintenance of a separate prison world, a chief means by which the inmate’s social experience inside the walls is ordered and controlled. On one level boobslang is used for light-hearted amusement, but on another it can be an important means of communicating beliefs, attitudes, ideas and emotions; of successfully negotiating the prison environment; and of offering a degree of privacy in discussing illegal activities. For some inmates the knowledge and use of boobslang is an essential part of their prison identity, though others choose not to use boobslang, thinking it sounds foolish, and considering that it stigmatises them as criminals. Regardless of the importance of boobslang to individual inmates, the argot remains a fascinating and socially significant aspect of New Zealand prison culture.

This thesis investigates the nature and vocabulary of New Zealand boobslang through information gathered from all of New Zealand’s prisons during the period 1996 – 2000. A lexicon of over 3,000 words and expressions is presented. Through lexicological and sociolinguistic analysis, the thesis explores the nature of the prison community in New Zealand, why this specialised language occurs, its particular characteristics and attributes as an antilanguage, and demonstrates how New Zealand boobslang differs from the prison argot of other countries.

3.2 AIMS OF THE STUDY

- To undertake a nationwide survey of New Zealand prison argot.
- To compile the first full-length dictionary of New Zealand prison argot, containing entries listing headword, definition, etymological information, citations from New Zealand literature, and cultural notes.
- To make a contribution to historical lexicography by providing a documented record of the speech habits of prison inmates in New Zealand at the end of the twentieth century.
- To trace the development of contemporary New Zealand prison argot from its origins in sixteenth century British cant to the present day, through a chronological review of canting literature over five centuries in England, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.
- To discuss the reasons why boobslang occurs among prison inmates by setting the language in its sociolinguistic context: defining boobslang as an antilanguage generated by an antisociety; and to give a sociolinguistic and lexicological analysis of boobslang, considering its various functions in the prison environment and differences between the boobslang used by male and female inmates.
- To demonstrate through the dictionary and accompanying analysis that the argot used here is, to a significant extent, a distinctive New Zealand variety, because of both its indigenous elements and its specific mixture of international influences that have impacted on New Zealand geographically, historically and culturally.

3.3 THE NEW ZEALAND PRISON COMMUNITY

New Zealand currently has 18 government-owned prisons, 15 of which are for men and 3 for women.¹ These prisons accommodate approximately 5,000 sentenced inmates and 650 remand inmates at any one time, although some 12,000 inmates move in and out of prison each year.² A further 25 offenders are held in home detention.³ Of New Zealand's prison inmates, 94% are male and 6% are female. Of the male sentenced inmates, approximately 51% identify as Māori, 36% identify as European, 10% identify as Pacific peoples and 1% identify as Asian. Of the female sentenced inmates, approximately 59% identify as Māori, 31% identify as European and 10% identify as Pacific peoples.⁴

¹ Until recently, New Zealand had 19 prisons. Addington Men's Prison (Christchurch) was closed on 29 November 1999. New regional prisons are planned for Northland, Gisborne/Bay of Plenty, Nelson and Dunedin. (See figure 1.)

² Kathy Dunstall, spokesperson for the Howard League for Penal Reform (NZ), p.c., 4 January 2001.

³ *Census of Prison Inmates 1999* (Wellington: Department of Corrections, December 2000) 1.

⁴ *ibid.*, 13-14. Note: at the date of the last prison census, there were no Asian women incarcerated in New Zealand prisons.

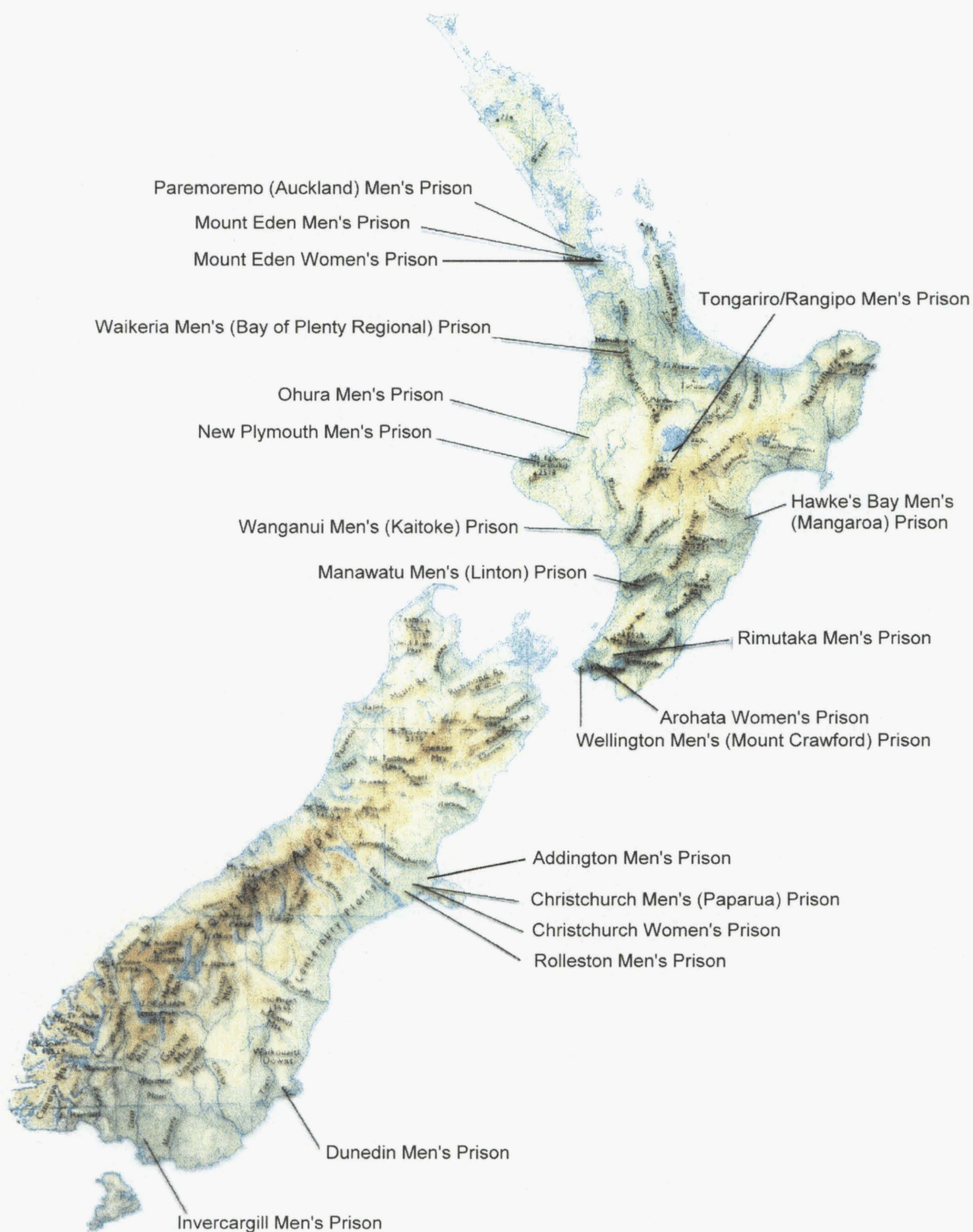


Figure 1. New Zealand's Prisons in the Period 1996-2000

New Zealand's prisons are administered by the Department of Corrections, a government department that manages non-custodial sentences and orders as well as prison sentences. More than 4,000 full-time, part-time and contract staff work in various locations around New Zealand, helping to manage offenders.⁵ Custodial prison sentences are managed directly by the Public Prisons Service.

The 18 prisons fall into several different categories. The majority of prisons cater for medium-security, minimum-security and remand inmates; however, Paremoremo (Auckland), Mount Eden, Waikeria and Wanganui Prisons also hold maximum-security inmates. In addition, Tongariro/Rangipo and Arohata Prisons cater for Corrective Trainees: young offenders aged between 16 and 19 years, serving a three-month custodial sentence intended to give them a 'taste of jail.'⁶ In most prisons, the inmate population is divided into 'wings' or 'units' for ease of management. The decision to place an inmate in a specific wing or unit may be arbitrary, or determined by space constraints, the inmate's security classification, or his or her status as either a remand or sentenced inmate. Placement may also be intended to address the specific needs of the inmate: there are, for example, drug-treatment units, non-gang units, units for inmates who have committed particular crimes (e.g. sex offenders), youth offenders' units (for inmates under 21), Designated Care units (for inmates with psychiatric disorders), Self-Care units (for long-term inmates completing their sentences and in the process of reintegration into general society), and segregation units (for inmates under threat from certain members of the 'mainstream' prison population). The standard prison unit is a self-contained structure, generally with capacity for 60, 80 or 100 inmates, and the majority of prison populations are divided into such groups.

Depending on the prison, the different units may have varying degrees of contact, but generally, they have little to do with one another. This does not mean, however, that the New Zealand prison population is entirely static; it is surprisingly fluid. Inmates are frequently transferred between prisons or prison units for a number of reasons: the inmate may have his security classification downgraded during his sentence and must

⁵ Department of Corrections Key Facts / Statistics. 21 December 2000.

<<http://www.corrections.govt.nz/facts/key.html>>.

⁶ Department of Corrections Statistics. 21 December 2000.

<<http://www.corrections.govt.nz/facts/statistics.html>>.

transfer to a unit or prison appropriate for his new classification; alternatively, he⁷ may have demonstrated perverse or violent behaviour at his current prison and must be transferred to a more secure prison, either as a punishment, or for his own safety or the safety of his fellow inmates; the inmate may wish to move from a mainstream prison unit to a segregation unit because the nature of his crime, gang affiliation, or general conduct in his current unit means that he is in danger of physical harm; or the inmate may apply to be transferred to a different geographical location so as to be closer to his friends or family. Those awaiting sentencing in remand units will be transferred to other units after sentencing. Some sentenced inmates will be transferred solely because of space or organisational constraints. Therefore, the prison population, although segregated from general society, is reasonably mobile, and the lines of communication between inmates from different prisons or prison units are more open than one might expect.

3.3.1 THE PRISON AS A TOTAL INSTITUTION

The modern New Zealand prison is based upon British and American archetypes;⁸ therefore, the New Zealand prison society is much the same as those overseas and conforms to a particular sociological and sociolinguistic model that can be clearly identified. The prison is what may be described as a 'total institution.' A total institution is 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together

⁷ The inmate will be referred to here as 'he' on the grounds that 94% of New Zealand prison inmates are male.

⁸ New Zealand's penal policy and practice is derived from Britain, and the structural design of New Zealand prison buildings is strongly influenced by British and American models. This latter point is significant, as the spatial arrangement of an institution has a marked impact upon the social interaction and behaviour of its inmates. New Zealand's oldest extant prison, New Plymouth, was designed in the mid-19C with information taken from the British Government's Blue Books, which contained plans of nearly all the institutions in England and Ireland. These plans were also instrumental in the design of Mount Eden (1882), the country's first maximum-security institution. Mount Eden was built on the same 'radial' pattern used at Trenton (New Jersey, 1836) and Pentonville (UK, 1842), and the finished design was highly reminiscent of Pentonville and Dartmoor Prisons. Paremoro (1968), New Zealand's current maximum-security prison, was influenced by the designs of Blundeston Prison (Suffolk, UK), and Marion Prison (Illinois); (Marion was, in turn, based on the design of Alcatraz). For more information see Greg Newbold, *Punishment and Politics* (1989), pp. 1, 2, 175.

lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.’⁹ Erving Goffman describes the four key factors that characterise total institutions:

First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of a member’s daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and are required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the day’s activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a pre-arranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution.¹⁰

New Zealand’s prisons fit these criteria particularly well. Inmates spend their time within the confines of the prison buildings or prison grounds, under the supervision of officers commissioned by the Department of Corrections/Public Prisons Service. The inmates’ washing, eating, work and recreation activities are performed in groups, where every person is given equal status by the authorities, and each is ordered to carry out a similar task to the others. The prison authorities dictate what the available activities are and when they occur. This system of enforced selection of activities is designed to support the prison’s public mission statement to provide both punishment and rehabilitation: ‘Our mission is to provide prison services which are safe, secure and humane ... and which contribute to reducing re-offending.’¹¹ For example, the imposed schedule for an East Wing inmate at Christchurch’s Paparua Prison runs as follows:

The cells are unlocked at 7am for breakfast. From 7.30am to 3pm, except for a lunch break, the inmates have to choose between education, being locked up, or staying in the exercise yards. They can swap activities at about 90-minute intervals.... The common-part area of the wing is empty but that will change at exactly 3pm when the cell doors are unlocked and inmates can begin their recreation. To amuse themselves they have a pool table, a dart board, and a television. Dinner is at 4.50pm and at 8.30 they will be locked in their cells for the night.¹²

Although there are several other types of total institutions, such as mental asylums, boarding schools, monasteries, ships and military training establishments, the prison is unique in that it is specifically that type of total institution designed to protect the community against what are perceived to be intentional dangers to it, and therefore the welfare of the inmates is not always the immediate issue.¹³ The fact that the inmates are considered dangers to the community renders the prison a closed society,

⁹ E. Goffman. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1962), xiii.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 6.

¹¹ Public Prisons Service Mission Statement Board, Addington Prison, Christchurch, December 1999.

¹² M. van Beynen. ‘Inside Paparua Prison – No Bed of Roses.’ *The Press* 2 February 1998, 5.

¹³ Goffman, 5.

with information about events inside the institution almost exclusively portrayed to mainstream society through the mass media. These circumstances mean that the prison society is not only segregated from mainstream society, but set up in conscious opposition to it, with the result that the prison society may be read as an 'antisociety.' An antisociety is a mode of resistance against the mainstream society, resistance which may take the form either of passive symbiosis, or of active hostility, and usually tends to be a criminal or underworld counterculture.¹⁴

3.3.2 SECONDARY SOCIALISATION, THE ANTISOCIETY AND THE ANTILANGUAGE

In entering a total institution such as a prison, inmates undergo a process of 'secondary socialisation.' Secondary socialisation is 'the internalisation of institutional or institution-based "sub-worlds."' ¹⁵ Secondary socialisation exists in addition to, and often in contradiction to, 'primary socialisation,' the process each individual undertakes to become part of society.¹⁶ This primary world is the one the individual first encounters and considers as normal. The inmate moves from the primary world that is known and natural into an alternate reality, which, in turn, has to be assimilated. Berger and Luckman note that: "The "sub-worlds" internalised in secondary socialisation are generally partial realities in contrast to the "base-world" acquired in primary socialisation. Yet they, too, are more or less cohesive realities, characterised by normative and affective as well as cognitive components."¹⁷ Thus, as the inmate assimilates the new 'reality,' he becomes resocialised. As the acquisition of language is an integral part of the inmate's primary socialisation, the adoption of a new language is an important component of his secondary socialisation and, in many ways, is the vehicle of his resocialisation.

However, because the prison is not an ordinary total institution, but an antisociety, the language acquired within that total institution as part of the inmate's secondary

¹⁴ M.A.K. Halliday. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978) 164.

¹⁵ P. Berger and T. Luckman. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin University Books, 1971) 149.

¹⁶ B. Moore. *A Lexicon of Cadet Language, Royal Military College, Duntroon, in the Period 1983 to 1985* (Canberra: Australian National Dictionary Centre, ANU, 1993) v.

¹⁷ Berger and Luckman, 158.

socialisation has a particular quality. The prison antisociety incorporates a separate, resistant world, manifested in the inmates' alternative attitudes, value and belief systems, social hierarchies and language. Howard Giles writes that a language reflects to a significant degree certain aspects of the society in which it is spoken: 'It not only reflects the interests, needs, experiences and environment of the people who speak it, but may also indicate something about the way a society is structured ... [such as] kinship terms, beliefs, norms and values, linguistic taboos, descriptive names for social and ethnic groups and terms for men and women.'¹⁸ The language of the prison antisociety arises out of its distinct social structure. The structure, at its most basic, consists of a division between the large managed group of inmates and the small supervisory staff. Inmates live in the institution full-time, with minimal access to the outside world (referred to simply and all-inclusively as **the outside** or **the outer**), while staff are normally on eight-hour shifts and are more fully integrated with mainstream society. The two groups tend to think of each other stereotypically: the prison officers perceive the inmates as bitter, secretive and untrustworthy, and the inmates perceive the officers as superior, autocratic and unfair.¹⁹ Some communication between the groups is necessary, but only on a restricted basis, so the two different social worlds develop alongside each other. The 'officers = superior / inmates = inferior' dichotomy gives rise to 'fraternisation' among the inmate population, that is, an organisational influence whereby a group of people in an identical (often disadvantaged) situation develop mutual support and common beliefs and values in opposition to the system that has placed them in their situation.²⁰ The inmates' language is a key way by which this fraternisation is maintained. In this way, the language may be categorised as an 'antilanguage,' a form of language generated and represented by an antisociety. The antilanguage that has developed in New Zealand's prisons is known as 'boobslang'.

An antilanguage has two main characteristic elements. The first is the forming of new words for old. Words in the standard mainstream language are replaced by new terms coined in the antilanguage. In this way, the standard language becomes

¹⁸ H. Giles. *Language and Social Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979) iii.

¹⁹ Goffman, 9.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 56.

'relexicalised'.²¹ As far as boobslang is concerned, this relexicalisation is partial and not total; not all words in the standard language have boobslang equivalents, and there are specific areas of lexical density:²² 'we expect to find [and do, in New Zealand's prisons] new words for types of criminal act, and classes of criminal and victim; for tools of the trade; for police and other representatives of the law enforcement structure of the society; for penalties, penal institutions, and the like.'²³ In some cases, the words coined in the antilanguage may have no semantic equivalent in the standard language. This does not mean they are untranslatable; rather, they do not function as coded elements in the semantic system of everyday language.²⁴ For example, a **kura visit** (from Māori *kura* = 'treasure' + visit) has no direct standard English equivalent and must be explained in a sentence as: 'a prison visit from a person on the "outside" to an inmate, during which the inmate receives a package of contraband (usually money or drugs), or a gift of some other kind.'

The second characteristic element of the antilanguage is that the vocabulary of the standard language becomes 'overlexicalised'.²⁵ This means that, in the antilanguage, there is not just one word for something, but several, these words being, by ordinary standards, synonymous. For example, in New Zealand's prisons, there are many terms that refer to the solitary confinement punishment cell, such as: **Bahamas; Barbados; basement; birdcage; block; Bronx; chateau; Club Med; den; digger; dog box; dog pound; dollar; downunder; dungeon; go-slow; him-and-her; hinaki; hole; ice-cream parlour; isolation cell; kupenga; lone hand; lost-and-found; pit; pokey or porky; pound; rest home; sand bin; septic tank; Siberia; slammer; time out place; and whorehouse**. Not all of the referents in the antilanguage are overlexicalised, only those which signify elements of especial importance in the antisociety, such as: the solitary confinement cell; the paedophile; the homosexual; Paremoremo Prison; the new prison officer; the informer; and the drug dealer. Overlexicalisation occurs within the subculture because language is used for verbal competition and display, but more importantly, because in the antisociety, social values are more clearly foregrounded

²¹ Halliday, 164.

²² For more information about the chief semantic categories of boobslang, see: D. Looser.

'Investigating Boobslang.' *NZWords* 2 (2) (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999) 1-3.

²³ Halliday, 165.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 173.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 165.

than within mainstream society.²⁶ Therefore, an examination of the occurrences of overlexicalisation is useful for defining the prominent features and priorities of, and perceived threats to, the inmate community.

3.4 FUNCTIONS OF BOOBSLANG

Inmates use boobslang for the following reasons:

- **To represent objects, personalities and procedures in everyday prison life;
to categorise prison experience**

This is probably the chief function of boobslang. Halliday writes that, 'An antilanguage is the means of realisation of a subjective reality: not merely expressing it, but actively creating and maintaining it.'²⁷ As the inmate becomes resocialised in the prison environment, he encounters, and learns to adapt to, different procedures and routines, value systems, social relationships, and systems of sanctions, rewards and punishments. His language adapts and expands to name, order and categorise these new experiences so as to make sense of them: 'Secondary socialisation requires the acquisition of role-specific vocabularies, which means, for one thing, the internalisation of semantic fields structuring routine interpretations and conduct within an institutional area. At the same time, "tacit understandings," evaluations and affective colorations of these semantic fields are also acquired.'²⁸ Gresham Sykes writes that by distinguishing and naming, we prepare ourselves for action. Through representation in prison argot, the 'activities of group members are no longer an undifferentiated stream of events; rather they have been analysed, classified, given labels; and these labels supply an evaluation and interpretation of experience as well as a set of convenient names.'²⁹

The inmate learns new words for various areas and environmental features of the prison, and for procedures in the routine functioning of day-to-day life in the prison. For example, there are words for the solitary confinement cell; for the segregation

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*, 172.

²⁸ Berger and Luckman, 158.

²⁹ G. Sykes. *The Society of Captives: A Study of a Maximum Security Prison* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958) 86.

section of the prison; for facilities for inmates with special needs; for the inmates' daily head-counts and inspections; and for cell checks, urine tests, strip searches, canteen orders, searches by the narcotics detection dog, and visits from friends and family. New patterns of behaviour also arise demanding evaluation and interpretation: behaviour not distinguished by mainstream society takes on a new importance and receives a special label. The inmates themselves are also classified according to the role they play in the prison environment.

- **To create and maintain social structures within the inmate population; to control interpersonal relationships**

Perhaps the most complex function of boobslang is the way in which it provides a map of the inmate social system.³⁰ Halliday notes that because the reality in which the antilanguage exists is a counter-reality, the antilanguage implies the foregrounding of social structure and social hierarchy, and implies a preoccupation with the definition and defence of identity through the ritual functioning of the social hierarchy.³¹ As has been discussed, the critical function of prison argot would appear to be its utility in ordering and classifying experience within the institution in terms which deal specifically with the major problems of prison life;³² thus, boobslang in its role of creating and maintaining social structures is simply a more specialised function of its general role of making sense of life in prison.

In his 1958 study of New Jersey State Prison, Gresham Sykes identifies five major problems faced by inmates: deprivation and frustration in the areas of social acceptance, material possessions, heterosexual relationships, personal autonomy, and personal security,³³ and argues that the inmate group will characterise individuals according to these concerns, and then attach distinctive names to the resulting types or typical social roles. By so doing, the group provides itself with a kind of shorthand which compresses the variegated range of its experience into a manageable framework. Sykes calls these generalised behaviour tendencies 'argot roles.'³⁴

³⁰ This section is intended only as a summary: for more in-depth sociological analyses of argot roles and the inmate social structure, see Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), Korn and McCorkle (1959), Giallombardo (1966), and Newbold (1978).

³¹ Halliday, 172.

³² Sykes, 85.

³³ *ibid.*, 106.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 86.

Argot roles tend not to be hierarchically organised according to rank or status, but are placed along a single, horizontal plane.³⁵ Despite this non-vertical differentiation, however, most argot labelling terms adhere to social values, and so may indicate social status. Sykes notes that: 'Words in the prison argot, no less than words in ordinary usage, carry a penumbra of admiration and disapproval, of attitude and belief, which channels and controls the behaviour of the individual who uses them or to whom they are applied.'³⁶ Therefore, various roles, or groups of roles, will accord the inmate a certain amount of prestige, while others will be associated with contempt.

Because the New Zealand prison community shares much with prison societies in other countries, the argot roles in New Zealand prisons are similar to those identified in prison studies overseas.

One of the most clearly defined social roles amongst New Zealand prison inmates is that of the informer. In boobslang an informer is generally known as a **nark**. Although he may also be known by a variety of other synonyms such as a **shelf** (or **shelfer**), a **shopper**, a **policeman**, or a **screw**, or a number of rhyming variants of **nark**, such as a **Noah's ark**, a **shark**, a **deep sea shark**, a **fishy shark**, or a **shark in the park**, it is the term **nark** that has the most currency. The position of the **nark** is unenviable; he is almost universally despised by the inmate group and is often subject to abuse and harassment, to the point where he may be placed in a segregation unit for his own protection. By informing upon his fellow inmates the **nark** defies the inmates' tacit solidarity and threatens the structure and safety of the entire prison community. To be labelled a **nark** is a heavy burden; the label is one of the most enduring of all the argot roles, and the **nark's** reputation generally follows him until his release.

The argot term **standover merchant** is commonly used to label an inmate who takes what he wants from others by force. The variants **standover cunt** and **standover**

³⁵ G. Newbold. 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' (Diss. University of Auckland, 1978) 337. Subsequently cited as Newbold. 'The Social Organization of Prisons.'

³⁶ Sykes, 86.

dude are also frequently applied, as are **heavy boy** and **caretaker**. Such an inmate tends to be treated with a mixture of fear and dislike, and a certain degree of contempt, as his dealings with other inmates are motivated by cowardice and greed. Like the **nark**, the **standover merchant** compromises and disrupts the cohesion of the inmate group. Similar to the **standover merchant** is the **king pin**, an inmate who has used violence or force to gain a position of leadership over the inmate population. The **king pin**'s role, however, is seldom seen, as securing money, goods and subservience by violence and coercion is one thing, but to be respected for it is another, and prospective **king pins** rarely rise to positions of leadership.

The type of inmate who comes closest to a true leader within the inmate community is the **staunchie**. The **staunchie** is the inmate who refuses to compromise or submit to the compulsions of formal authority, but does so with dignity and without sacrificing the well-being of the inmate population. He shows integrity in face of privation, adheres to the inmate code of ethics, and his behaviour is acclaimed as an example that others would do well to follow. Alongside the **staunchie** is the man with **heart**, a related quality, referring to stoicism, courage and tenacity.³⁷ Such an inmate may also be described as **solid**. The role of the **staunchie** is of considerable functional significance for the inmate social system. The inmate who can maintain self-control, cope confidently with the pressures of prison life, curb his frustration, and who can stop himself striking back at his custodians, preserves the status quo and helps maintain the harmony needed for inmates to survive in the prison environment. 'The **Staunchie** and the man with **heart** have their antitheses in the nomenclature of the **weak mug**; the **flea**; the **germ**; the **wonk**; the **thing**; and numerous other expressly derogatory epithets.'³⁸ These inmates pose little threat to the harmony of inmate community and are regarded as sad, pathetic nuisances, generally beyond redemption, to be treated with pity, contempt, or disgust.

Because the prison environment is intolerant, those inmates who are seen not to cope confidently with prison life may be labelled as 'weak' and preyed upon by other inmates. Therefore, it is common for some inmates to erect a false front and to lay claim to greater courage than they possess, either as a form of protection, or as a way

³⁷ Newbold, 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' 339.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 339.

of gaining prestige or respect that they would not otherwise have. Sometimes this persona may be developed to the point where it not only protects the inmate, but is used to intimidate others. In spite of his efforts, however, this type of inmate is not usually respected by his fellow inmates, but may be derided for his obvious pretence. Such inmates are known as **plastic gangsters**, or more generally as **wannabes**. The **plastic gangster's** deceptiveness means that he may not be trusted, and in his more violent role, he may be a disruptive influence in the prison, as he destabilises the cohesion of the inmate group.

In prison, access to luxuries is restricted. Although inmates may fill in a **P119 (canteen form)** once a week, on which they may order groceries and other goods not directly supplied by the prison, these must be paid for from the inmate's own funds, which are generally meagre. In many cases, the items bought on the **P119** are quickly used, leaving the inmate without extra food, cigarettes, etc., for the greater part of the week. Any illegal contraband required by an inmate is obviously not available on the **P119**. Therefore, in response to demand, a role has developed for an inmate in possession of a steady supply of goods to advance these to his fellow inmates on a basis of compounding interest. These entrepreneurial inmates are labelled according to the goods they stock, for example, **the dairy** sells food; **the don**, **Cash Converters**, **the takeaways** or **the canteen** sells drugs; and **the tank**, in addition to drugs, may also supply phonecards, money, magazines and hypodermic needles. **The shop** offers the widest range of goods, usually stocking all of this negotiable material. Although **the shop** meets a genuine need of the inmate group, he is regarded with ambivalence as his commercial policies are uncompromising and unsympathetic; an inmate ends up worse off for having dealt with **the shop**, and there is no recourse for the inmate who does not pay his debts. **The shop** is less motivated by his interest in the well-being of the group than by the desire to achieve his own financial or material ends. As Sykes points out: 'Inmate cohesion or inmate solidarity is sacrificed for personal aggrandizement; bonds of mutual loyalty, aid, affection, and respect are subordinated to individualistic ends.'³⁹

³⁹ Sykes, 107.

The role of the **scab** (or **scabber**) demonstrates another way in which goods may be acquired in prison. The **scab** is an inmate who is either unable or unwilling to support himself sufficiently in prison and so is forced to beg from other inmates. Unfortunate circumstances generally force an inmate to adopt this role: he may have lost his good job in prison; he may have lost money through gambling or feeding a drug addiction; or he may have no family or friends to deposit money into his Trust Account. Because of his scavenging habits, aside from being known as a **scab**, the inmate may also be known by a number of metaphorical appellations, such as: a **fly**; a **gannet**; a **hyena**; a **leech**; a **magpie**; a **seagull**; a **piranha**; and a **vulture**. Superficially, the **scab** may appear to pose little threat to the harmony and cohesion of the inmate community, and he is generally seen as a nuisance: when luxuries are scarce already, there is little to hand out to others. The **scab** may, however, be problematic, because if an inmate is generous to a **scab**, he begins a relationship that may be hard to break. He also sets a precedent by allowing one **scab** to become dependent upon him, and consequently he may be targeted by other **scabs**. Other inmates may view the generous inmate as weak and foolish, and so may try to manipulate him in various ways. In the main, however, the **scab** tends to be scorned rather than pitied. His behaviour automatically demeans him in the sight of other inmates, as his position as a supplicant is perceived as a serious loss of face (or **form**), and his attempts to get something for nothing mean that he does not function as a fair and co-operative member of the inmate community.

Another distinct argot role is that of the inmate with a psychiatric disorder, known by such labels as a **ten-center** or **twenty-five-center**, a **noose**, or a **psych**. In his 1978 study of Paremoremo Prison, Newbold writes that:

A few of these men are considered dangerous and cautiously avoided, while others live peacefully but never become integrated within the prisoner community because of their inability to interact in a reciprocal fashion with other individuals.... [these inmates] are either tolerated or ignored by the rest of the population, and frequently their idiosyncratic behaviour is taken to provide a form of comedy relief for other prisoners.⁴⁰

However, since the closure of many of the country's psychiatric institutions during the 1980s and 1990s, an increasing number of inmates requiring psychiatric supervision are entering the prisons. Of these, a large proportion are dangerous; in the period 1996-2000, over 70% were in prison for a violent or a sexual violence

⁴⁰ Newbold, 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' 348.

offence.⁴¹ Therefore, although sometimes made fun of, these inmates tend to be treated with apprehension, and many have now been segregated from the mainstream prison population and placed in specialist units.

One well-recognised social role is that of the **old logger**. The **old logger** is an inmate who has served a considerable amount of time in prison and, by virtue of his experience with prison culture, is respected because of his superior knowledge, and his consequent ability to negotiate the prison environment more effectively than his fellow inmates. The role of the **old logger** is not based directly upon a behavioural tendency, but arises as a result of his prison background, although his behaviour and conduct towards other inmates are distinguished from those of other inmates by his long time in prison. The **old logger** is seen as a harder, stauncher inmate, with a more serious adherence to inmate code than that shown by less experienced inmates. He is often seen to be a product of a 'harder' prison life that many inmates believe to have existed in the past, although this view of former prison life is not necessarily true, and is a sentiment that may be described as 'jail nostalgia.'

Occupying a completely different role from that of the **old logger** is the **straight**, or the **baldhead**. **Straight** or **baldhead** is a derisive label, pinned on the inmate who is seen to be an 'accidental criminal.'⁴² This inmate is usually a first offender and has often come to prison for a 'silly' crime; for example, he may have been set up, or he may not have paid accrued parking fines. The **baldhead** is pitied, as he is perceived as not being 'hard' enough to have committed a 'decent' crime. He is generally derided as a gullible fool and may become the target of scams, or may be preyed upon by **scabs**. Because the **baldhead** has not been a member of the criminal underworld before coming to prison, he does not conceive of himself as a criminal and tends to be more aligned with the prison administration than with the inmate population. This furthers his alien status, but also makes him a threat to the inmate community. His identification with institutional officials and his sympathy with the values of mainstream society, combined with his naiveté, mean that he may unwittingly divulge information about his fellow inmates' activities, and therefore, he cannot be trusted.

⁴¹ *Census of Prison Inmates 1997*, 12; *Census of Prison Inmates 1999*, 2.

⁴² R. Giallombardo. *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966) 115.

A prominent role conception in New Zealand prisons is that of the homosexual. There are two main types of homosexual: the inceptive homosexual, known as a **turd burglar** or a **butch**, and the receptive homosexual, known as a **woolly woofter** or a **dolly**. Of the receptive homosexuals, a distinction is drawn between those who engage in homosexuality because it is preferred, that is, simply as a continuation of a role pursued outside prison; and those whose sexual role is restricted to the penal environment. The receptive homosexual may take this role for a variety of reasons: because he is coerced; because he submits voluntarily, with no extra-sexual inducement; or because he sees his submission as an effective way to acquire goods and services. Interestingly, in this New Zealand study, those motivated by this last reason are most clearly labelled in the women's argot, as a **canteen doll (CD)**, a female inmate who performs sexual favours either for money or for extra **P119** goods. In men's prisons, because of the inmates' male-dominance orientation, those inmates who assume a receptive (feminine) role in homosexual relationships are treated with some contempt, as their submission is perceived as a sacrifice of their manhood. Conversely, those who assume an inceptive (masculine) role are simply understood as searching for physical release.⁴³

The final two roles discussed have less to do with the role assumed once in prison than with the criminal background of the inmate before entering prison. In these cases, the inmate roles are merely adaptive continuations of roles pursued prior to incarceration.⁴⁴ The first of these two is the role of the gang-member. Generally, gang-members – especially those belonging to more prominent gangs such as the Mongrel Mob or the Black Power – are treated with some deference; aside from their vicious reputations, they have ready access to money, drugs and supporters to provide back-up, both in and out of prison. In prison, as on the **outside**, gang-members are divided into two chief types: the **patch member** and the **prospect**. Each type is dependent on the other to a certain degree to maintain his particular status. The **patch member** (a full member of a gang, having undergone a lengthy initiation process to earn his **patch** or gang colours) is normally the more respected, being more experienced and having already proved himself to the gang. He has command over the

⁴³ Sykes, 97.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 354-355.

prospect. The **prospect** (a 'trainee' member of a gang, undergoing the initiation process) looks after the **patch member**, performing various tasks of a usually menial and sometimes dangerous nature. This 'servant' role taken by the **prospect** reinforces the status of the **patch member**, elevating him to a kind of aristocracy. In return, the **prospect** benefits from the status brought by his gang affiliation, the protection of other **patch members** and **prospects**, favours from the **patch member**, as well as working toward his goal of becoming a **patch member** himself, as his servitude displays his loyalty and counts as part of his training. Significantly, because many young inmates are recruited in prison as **prospects** into the gang and later go on to become **patch members** after release, they represent a converse role-continuation process, as their role is conceived in prison and continued on the **outside**.

The second social role dictated by the inmate's criminal background is that of the child molester, known almost universally as a **kid fucker (KF)**. It is somewhat of a cliché that the child molester is universally despised in prison, and many are placed in segregation units to protect them from the mainstream prison inmates. Once in prison, unlike the homosexual and the gang-member, the child molester cannot continue the activity that characterises him, but is stigmatised by his crime to the extent that his behavioural tendency is assumed. The main function of the child molester is his role as the moral scapegoat in the inmate society. His crime is seen as so abhorrent that it gives other inmates a benchmark of truly serious crime and helps them to justify their own crimes in relation. The importance of having the child molester in this position in the prison is attested to by the argot, where overlexicalisation obtains: in addition to a **kid fucker**, a child molester may also be labelled by such derogatory terms as: a **freak**, a **reject**, a **tamperer**, a **mullock**, and a **rock spider**, as well as by a wide variety of other distinguishing epithets.

- **To indicate levels of identity and solidarity networks**

As the acquisition of the antilanguage is a fundamental element of secondary socialisation, a knowledge of boobslang is crucial in establishing identity as a New Zealand prison inmate and signifying solidarity with one's fellow inmates. Refusal to assimilate by not learning the language inevitably leads to negative alienation, and in some cases, this refusal to learn the argot may be a deliberate attempt by an inmate

who does not identify as a 'criminal' to resist integration with his environment and fellow inmates.

As well as identifying solely as a prison inmate, the inmate may identify as a member of one or more inmate groups within the larger prison community, the members of which rely on each other for a wide range of practical assistance and emotional support. These groups tend to have their own specialised vocabularies in addition to the general terms common to the majority of inmates. For example, drug-users have a wide knowledge of drug-related terms, including words for the drugs themselves; devices for, and ways of, taking them; and methods for smuggling them in and out of prison. Gang-members, too, because of their strong 'family' solidarity networks and fervent opposition to other gangs, have developed unique terms that identify and support their own. For example, the Mongrel Mob have developed a specific dialect known as **Mongrel**, in which key words are relexicalised with 'dog' equivalents: gang-member/man = **dog**; woman = **bitch**; child = **puppy**; and cell = **kennel**. The Mongrel Mob also substitute their gang colour (red) in phrases or expressions normally featuring the word 'blue' (the gang colour of the rival Black Power); thus one hears 'out of the **red**' and 'once in a **red** moon' instead of their conventional equivalents.

Through the use of boobslang, an inmate may also indicate his criminal background, his age, his sexual orientation, his amount of prison experience, and his ethnic identification (for example, through the use of Māori prison terminology).⁴⁵ Therefore, boobslang functions strongly as an identity marker on many different levels; apart from labelling other inmates according to their roles, or labelling objects and procedures and categorising prison experience externally, an inmate can also label himself, using language to construct himself as an individual within the prison society.

⁴⁵ For further information about the ways in which an inmate may identify using boobslang, see D. Looser. 'Boob Jargon: The Language of a Women's Prison.' *New Zealand English Journal*, 13 (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999) 14-37.

- **To communicate ideas, beliefs and attitudes**

In addition to labelling concrete aspects of the inmate world, abstract entities such as beliefs and attitudes need to be labelled and described. Many of the terms discussed in previous sections have a strong attitudinal component; in such cases their significance lies not in what is denoted, but what is connoted. There are, however, situations in which boobslang is used to directly represent an attitude or set of beliefs. One such belief system is the 'inmate code of ethics' (also 'inmate code of honour'), which describes the ways in which an inmate is expected to conduct himself in the prison for the good of the inmate group. This 'inmate code of ethics' comprises four main tenets: no **narking** (informing); no **tealeafing** (stealing from one's fellow inmates); no **scabbing** (being too friendly with prison officers);⁴⁶ and no lying about the nature of one's crime. The prison argot is a key way through which these beliefs are communicated; it is significant that three of the four edicts are encapsulated in boobslang.

- **To indicate and enforce codes of behaviour**

Sykes has made the point that words in the prison argot carry shades of admiration and disapproval, which control the behaviour of the person who uses them, and to whom they are applied. The power of these words to control is amplified by the fact that social values are so clearly foregrounded in the antisociety. Therefore, one chief function of the verbal communication of beliefs and attitudes is to effect social control, to put members of the society under pressure to conform to certain prescribed behaviours. In the prison, this is demonstrated most clearly with the 'inmate code of ethics,' defined above. Although there is no single, reliable way in which the code is implemented, one of the most common and effective means by which the code may be indicated and enforced is through the use of boobslang. An inmate who breaks the rule against informing, for example, faces the danger of being labelled a **nark**, and thus becoming one of the most despised and vituperated members of the prison. Likewise, an inmate revealed as a **tealeafer** or a **scab** will find it hard to shake the stigma with which he has been burdened. As a result, these labels may lead to the inmate being physically threatened, from merely being harassed or having his personal property tampered with or destroyed, to being violently assaulted. The

⁴⁶ Not to be confused with **scab** v. to beg or bludge from one's fellow inmates (see earlier passage on the role of the **scab**).

inmate may also be **put on the coat**, that is, assiduously ignored by the rest of the inmate group for a period of time, in some cases for the remainder of his sentence. Significantly, in this instance, it is the deliberate *absence* of language that makes the inmate's time in prison most difficult to bear, as the isolation of the prison makes inmates extremely dependent on emotional reciprocity. Consequently, simply the threat of being **put on the coat** is enough to check much continued deviant behaviour.⁴⁷

- **To vent frustration**

When prisoners are living at close quarters in a volatile environment for a long period of time, and are both sexually and materially deprived, tension and frustration are inevitably produced. Therefore, the inmate needs to vent his frustration at regular intervals. Boobslang provides one way in which this may be done; there are many insulting and abusive terms, both general and specific.

One commentator on prison argot⁴⁸ argues that, because the insult is in prison argot, a relexicalised version of the standard language, and not the inmate's primary language, the insult is not so great, as tension is reduced to a degree because of the indirect impact of the terminology. Therefore, prison argot functions as a 'safety-valve' to diffuse potentially violent situations because the tension is redirected. I differ from this viewpoint and argue that, rather than being a lesser or more indirect version of the standard language learnt on the **outside**, the language acquired in prison – especially to an inmate who identifies with the prison environment – in fact has greater import, as it is this **inside** reality (antisociety) that is most immediate, and therefore the **inside** language (antilanguage) that is most significant. Consequently, using a boobslang term will not necessarily prevent a violent confrontation, but may encourage it, especially if the term is used provocatively, rather than in retaliation. Because of its loaded meaning, however, it is possible that in some situations, an exchange of boobslang expletives may take the place of a physical altercation.

⁴⁷ Giallombardo, 112.

⁴⁸ B. Little. 'Prison Lingo: A Style of American English Slang.' *Anthropological Linguistics* 24 (3) (Bloomington, IN: Anthropology Department, Indiana University, Summer 1982) 211-212.

- **To boost morale and provide emotional support**

From another point of view, the loaded meaning attached to many of the boobslang terms may be used to a positive end. In the prison environment, where opportunities to display affection are limited, the language is a means of providing emotional support, boosting morale and camaraderie. This is important and necessary, as inmates are vulnerable, removed from their friends and family, and under constant pressure to maintain a staunch, impersonal façade.

- **To serve a practical purpose as a secret code**

Several scholars have commented upon the significance of 'secrecy' in prison argot. In most cases, these writers have tended to downplay this feature. Halliday notes that: 'The theme of secrecy is a familiar one in what we might call "folk antilinguistics" – in members' and outsiders' explanations of the use of an antilanguage.... [but] it is unlikely to be the major cause of [its] existence. Secrecy is a feature of the jargon rather than a determinant of the language.'⁴⁹ Goffman writes that the antilanguage is not restricted to inmates, but that: 'The staff, especially its lower levels, will know this language, too, and will use it when talking to inmates, reverting to more standardised speech when talking to superiors and outsiders.'⁵⁰ Sykes also points out that that the theory that prison argot functions to maintain secrecy by keeping the law-abiding in ignorance is 'somewhat doubtful ... A professional thief, for example, has pointed out that the criminal immediately discloses his intentions to the forces of law and order if he uses criminal argot in public.'⁵¹

This is certainly true of the situation in New Zealand's prisons; the police and prison officers are familiar with much of the boobslang spoken by the inmates. However, not all of the boobslang is open to the officers. In the prison, a distinction may be made between 'open' argot and 'closed' argot. 'Open' argot refers to those boobslang terms that have been in use for a long time, and are widely known throughout New Zealand's prisons and used by both inmates and officers (some of these terms may also feature in prison vocabularies overseas). Several of these 'open' terms may find their way into wider criminal subcultures, or may eventually be assimilated into

⁴⁹ Halliday, 166.

⁵⁰ Goffman, 53.

⁵¹ Sykes, 85.

general usage. 'Closed' argot refers to those boobslang terms that are used only by the inmates. As Halliday points out, 'effective teamwork does depend, at times, on exchanging meanings that are inaccessible to the victim, and communication among prisoners must take place without the participation of the gaoler.'⁵² These terms may be prison-specific, or used by a small group within the inmate population. Commonly, they may be coined simply for the purpose of a particular criminal job. As a result, these terms are more transient and, although some will assume greater currency and permanence, they usually have a high turnover rate and are quickly replaced with new synonyms. A significant number of boobslang terms come into the category of 'closed' argot; thus, secrecy is a necessary strategic property of boobslang and enables the inmates to function and communicate effectively within the restrictive prison environment.

- **To be verbally economical**

According to the key features that characterise total institutions, the inmates share the same environment, undertake common activities, and are subject to the same system of punishments and rewards. Therefore, the inmates' prison experiences will be similar. As has also been discussed, the novelty of the prison environment with its unique geography, routines, procedures and social organisation requires labelling. Consequently, the inmates need names for the new, shared experiences; to rely solely on standard English would be clumsy and time-consuming. Inevitably, more economical boobslang equivalents are produced. For example, a procedure whereby an inmate is denied privileges to which he would normally have access, is known as **OPs**; a procedure whereby inmates are required to form an ordered line or to take regular positions in groups before participating in a certain activity, to ensure that the activity is performed in a disciplined and well-organised way, is known as a **parade**; a procedure whereby officers inspect inmates' cells to ensure that general hygiene standards are being upheld, is a **cell standard**; and the cell for mentally unbalanced or 'at risk' inmates is known by variety of names such as a **safe cell**; an **obs** (observation) **cell**; a **strip cell**, or a **pink cell**.

⁵² Halliday, 166.

- **To provide euphemism, humour and opportunities for creative language play**

Sometimes the function of boobslang is not to be verbally economical, but to act as a platform for verbal display. Many inmates are linguistically astute and dark sense of humour pervades the argot vocabulary, rich with irony. One finds instances of euphemism, metaphor, alliteration, alphabetisms, acronyms, allusion, compounding, blending, and rhyming slang, all of which draw upon a zestful conglomeration of sources. Humour and imagination in the language is necessary in helping inmates to cope with the severity and tedium of prison life. Finding humour in one's prison situation alleviates tension, as do opportunities for satirising and ridiculing the prison administration. Verbal competition, too, is one way in which an inmate may raise or maintain his status amongst his fellow inmates. Significantly, many of these terms reflect our own unique New Zealand variety of boobslang. Examples of New Zealand boobslang are discussed in the following section.

3.5 THE NEW ZEALAND VARIETY

In terms of its basic construction and functions, boobslang is much like other antilanguages; however, most of the terminology is unique and constitutes a distinctive New Zealand variety of prison argot.⁵³ This New Zealand variety of prison argot is subject to many of the same influences as the language of general society and reflects the unique position that New Zealand occupies and has occupied in the world geographically, culturally and historically. The chief influences upon New Zealand culture and its boobslang are Australian, British, American, Māori and Polynesian. The Australian influences arise from Australia's close geographical proximity, its strong economic ties with New Zealand, the high rate of emigration between the two countries over the past two centuries, and the fact that many New Zealand prison inmates have also spent time in Australian prisons. British influences come from Britain's role as the mother country from the early colonial period until recent years. Many American influences have originated from popular culture via television, films and music, and from the strong identification with African-American culture exhibited by many young Māori and Pacific Island people. Māori influences are representative of the country's indigenous culture, while Polynesian influences are due mainly to the significant number of Pacific Island people resident in New Zealand. Finally, there is the influence of what is often called 'kiwi culture,' a mainly Pākehā-focused *mélange* of cultures that is associated with the national identity. The clearest way of establishing the distinctive nature of New Zealand boobslang is through an examination of the linguistic mechanisms that construct the language, considering how examples of these various constructions are informed by the hybrid influences that make up New Zealand culture.

RHYMING SLANG

Probably the most obvious example of the way in which British influences have helped shape boobslang is the presence of rhyming slang terminology. This device

⁵³ For further information on boobslang as a distinctively New Zealand variety of prison argot, see D. Looser. 'Boobslang and Kiwi Culture: The Oral Communication of New Zealand Prison Inmates.' *Rostra* 34 (Wellington: Speech Communication Association of New Zealand Inc., December 2000) 9-15.

creates 'nonsense' redundancy around a particular lexical item, where largely monosyllabic words are replaced by phrases and compounds of generally three to four syllables.⁵⁴ Rhyming slang originated as a Cockney dialect, but gained currency in Australia, followed by New Zealand, largely through convict transportation and colonist expansion. Over the past 150 years, rhyming slang became part of general slang, and was adopted by the armed forces and criminal subcultures. However, the most common use of rhyming slang in New Zealand now is in prison (probably because of the opportunities it provides for verbal competition and display, and its practical function as a secret code); otherwise, rhyming slang is not a feature of contemporary New Zealand English. Increasingly, among prison inmates, the rhyming slang formula has been used to create distinctively New Zealand terms, and the older imported rhyming slang terms, although still strongly apparent, are being given new meanings or being replaced.⁵⁵

Those newly devised terms fall mainly into two categories. The first category contains 'criminalised' variants of existing innocuous imported rhyming slang terms. Most of these terms rely on a knowledge of prison argot or the argot of certain criminal subcultures to understand their full import, and many criminalised variants are based directly on existing boobslang words and expressions. The second category concerns those rhyming slang terms that are New Zealand-specific, referring to, or based upon, a miscellany of well-known New Zealand people, objects or institutions.

In New Zealand's prisons, there are several examples of criminalised variants of conventional rhyming slang terminology that originated in Britain, the United States or Australia. **Bob Hope** for 'dope' was originally used in the sense of an 'idiot,' but is used amongst inmates in the sense of 'marijuana.' To acquire an item **on the Murray cod** originally referred to acquiring an item 'on the nod' = on credit; however, inmates refer to a person as being **on the Murray cod**, being 'on the nod' = under the influence of intravenous drugs. The term, **babbling brook**, which originally referred to a camp or army 'cook' is now used in the phrase **do a babbling brook**, rhyming

⁵⁴ R. Antilla and S. Embleton. 'The Iconic Index: From Sound Change to Rhyming Slang.' *Iconicity in Language*. Raffaele Simone ed. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995) 102-104.

⁵⁵ It is worth noting, however, that some traditional Cockney rhyming slang terms that in Britain were recorded forty years ago as already obsolescent, are still in use in New Zealand prisons, in either the same form, or with very slight variation; for example: **soldier bold** = cold; **soap and water** = daughter; **I suppose** = nose.

with ‘do a cook,’ to break down pharmaceutical products containing codeine or morphine sulphate in order to extract the morphine and process it into heroin. **Lost and found**, which in Cockney dialect refers to a ‘pound’ (£) is used for **the pound**, the solitary confinement punishment cell; and **currant cake** for ‘awake’ is prison rhyming slang for **homebake**, a characteristic morphine product yielded from pharmaceutical products containing codeine or morphine sulphate. **Four-by-two** formerly meant a ‘Jew,’ and now refers to a **screw** = a prison officer; and **hammer and tack**, which in the United States denoted ‘back,’ and in Australia the (race) ‘track’ is used by inmates to refer to **smack** = heroin. **Braces and bits** for ‘tits,’ has become **brace and bit** for a **fit** = a hypodermic syringe.

There are also a number of instances where New Zealand-specific prison rhyming slang terms have been coined. Examples include: **T. H. Lowry** or **Tom Lowry** = a Māori; **matagouri** = a Māori; **five eight** = one’s best mate; **Babe Ruth** = *Truth* (New Zealand tabloid newspaper); **Maurice Trapp** = a crap; **shark in the park** = a **nark** (informer); **Peter Snell** = a cell; and **rock lobster** = a Mongrel Mobster.

Interestingly, in this study, rhyming slang terminology tended to be used with greater frequency by Pākehā inmates in the 30+ age group. The older the group of inmates, the more likely they were to use rhyming slang. Young Māori and Pacific Island inmates tended not to use rhyming slang, but instead used African-American derived terminology, with a strong similarity to street language. The Māori and Pacific Island inmates identified more strongly with the ethnic minority African-American culture, probably due to greater access to popular culture in prisons.

LOCAL ALLUSION

Rhyming slang terminology, by its construction, alludes to people and objects with often no semantic connection to the referent. There are however, other forms of allusion in boobslang that relate directly to the referent. Of these terms, a great many allude to various aspects of New Zealand culture. Some terms refer to New Zealand sporting icons, as seen with the expression to **do a John Walker** = to escape from prison, ‘do a runner’; others allude to traditionally ‘kiwi’ institutions, as seen with the

term **the dairy** to refer to the inmate in the prison or prison wing in possession of a steady supply of negotiable material for sale to other inmates. In addition, a pornographic magazine may be referred to as a **Woman's Weekly** or an **Auto Trader** (pornographic magazines are illegal in New Zealand prisons and so inmates have to refer to them by using the titles of more innocent magazines). When inmates get together to do deals for drugs, money and other contraband it is to **Buy, Sell and Exchange**, alluding to the title of New Zealand's popular weekend trading magazine.

Distinctively New Zealand allusions in boobslang occur when areas of the prison are named after well-known places around the country. For example, inmates may label various areas of a wing, or rows of cells in a compound, with the names of famous New Zealand streets. Because 10% of New Zealand's inmates are from Auckland, the street names are usually Auckland ones, and are named because the prison area has similarities with either the street's prominent characteristics, or its name. For example: **Ponsonby Road** = an area of the prison inhabited mainly by Pacific Islanders; **Otara Street** = a rough, unkempt area of the prison; **Queen Street** = the longest row of cells in a prison compound, or the main wing of a prison; **K Road** = an area of the prison inhabited mainly by transsexual inmates; and **Cook Street** = an area of a prison inhabited either by Pacific (Cook) Islanders, or by kitchen workers.

COMPOUNDING AND BLENDING

Further neologisms are produced by compounding. In these cases, the root word is not always New Zealand-specific, but the newly coined terms tend to be. For example: **boob** for prison generates the terms: **boobhead**, **boobslang** and **boobweed**, as well as **boob camp**, **boob dot**, **boob gear**, **boob gun** and **boob story**. **Screw** for prison guard creates: **screwbox**, **screwdriver**, and **screwling**, as well as **baby screw**, **bad screw**, **good screw**, **old school screw**, **pig dog screw** and **mimi screw**. The terms **lag** or **lagger** for a prison inmate give rise to: **bed and breakfast lag(ger)**, **old lagger**, **first lagger**, **jet lagger**, **Tupac lag**, **girl's lag** and **violent lagger**; and terms **lag** or **lagging** for a prison sentence produce: **beach lag**, **cruisy lag**, **beach lag**, **hard lag**, **hell lag** and **wicked lag**. One other term of interest is **Clayton's** from the 1980 Australian advertisement for Clayton's, an alcoholic substitute marketed with the slogan: 'It's the

drink I have when I'm not having a drink.' This has been picked up in general New Zealand lexis as an adjectival prefix to indicate anything sham, substandard or non-existent, and many prisonised usages have developed, such as: **Clayton's drugs**, **Clayton's food**, **Clayton's friend**, **Clayton's job**, **Clayton's lawyer**, **Clayton's punishment**, **Clayton's screw**, and **Clayton's visit**.

Blending is also a common way in which new words may be coined amongst inmates. One good example of blending is **scobie** = a probationary prison officer, in the process of training to become a fully qualified prison officer; from a blend of **screw** = a prison officer, and **probie** = a junior or probationary member of a gang, in training to become a full member.

METAPHOR

Metaphor also abounds; a great many booslang terms derive their humour or significance from transferred or figurative uses of existing words; for example, a **spud** is the term given to a Māori skinhead, or a Māori prison officer considered by Māori inmates to have internalised Pākehā values, using a potato to stand for something that is 'dark on the outside' but 'white on the inside.' Conversely, a **yoghurt-coated raisin** is the term applied to a Pākehā who identifies strongly with, or attempts to pass as, Māori, after the confectionery item that is 'white on the outside,' but 'dark on the inside.' In drug terminology, an **old fulla** is the name for a 100mg morphine sulphate tablet, after the tablet's grey colour; and a thin-rolled marijuana joint is described variously as a **toothpick**, a **matchstick**, a **greyhound**, or a **racehorse**. The term **kennel**, a cell belonging to a Mongrel Mob member, is derived from **dog** = a Mongrel Mob Member (from a mongrel as a type of dog), and **house** = a cell; literally a 'house' for a 'dog.' A loose, promiscuous woman is known as the **Hataitai Tunnel**, because she experiences a lot of 'traffic,' after her similarity with the busy tunnel that connects State Highways 1 and 2 with Wellington's City Centre.

ALPHABETISMS, ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Alphabetisms are a common way in which phrases and expressions are encapsulated economically. Some of these alphabetisms stand for the titles of official prison programmes or procedures, while others stand for existing boobslang expressions. Examples include: **ACAC** All Cops Are Cunts, or All Crims Are Cool, used mainly in cell graffiti or tattoos; **C and R** Control and Restraint = an immobilisation procedure performed by prison officers upon a violent or disruptive inmate; **CT** Corrective Training = a three-month custodial programme for youth offenders; **DIC** Dick In Child = a child molestation offence; **KF** Kid Fucker = a paedophile; **IDU** Identified Drug User; **PWK** Public Wing Kicking = a group attack upon a single inmate; **TC** Tunnel Cunt = a promiscuous woman; **Tough Cunt** = a tough man; **Tight Cunt** = a miserly inmate who refuses to share his possessions; or **Top Cat** = the most powerful or influential inmate in a prison or prison wing. Similarly, acronyms also feature; for example, **POLICE** a derogatory term for the police, standing for: Pack Of Lice-Infested Cannabis Eaters.

The use of boobslang abbreviations tends to be shared to a larger degree with the prison staff. This is because, in the main, these terms are abbreviations of common prison-related terminology, concerned with prison procedure, criminal offences, and categories of inmate. For example: **ags** = aggravated robbery; **obs** = observation (a procedure whereby an 'at risk' inmate is confined to his cell and observed at frequent intervals), **obs cell** observation cell (a cell for 'at risk' inmates); **segs** = segregation (a situation in which an inmate is placed in a unit away from the general prison population, either as a punishment, or for his own safety); **seps** = separates (punishment segregation); and **stream** = mainstream (the general prison population; one of the general prison population).

ALLITERATION

Inmates also devise humorous alliterative terms, as seen particularly with terms for homosexuals, such as: **anal astronaut** or **anal avenger**, **rectal ranger** and **poo-hole pirate**.

MĀORI AND PACIFIC ISLAND TERMINOLOGY

The use of the Māori language is a significant vein of influence that runs throughout the New Zealand boobslang vocabulary. Many terms are not simply Māori language translations of mainstream English words and expressions, but are structured argot terms in their own right. Examples include: **hinaki** (eel trap) and **kupenga** (net) = both a prison and a solitary confinement cell; **kura visit** (*kura* = treasure) = a prison visit to an inmate from his family or friends on the outside, during which the inmate receives a parcel of contraband (usually money or drugs), or a gift of some kind; **Maunga Whau** = Mount Eden Prison; **tauirā** (student, apprentice) = a gang prospect, that is, a young gang member building up his credentials in order to become a full **patch member**; **uma rapiti** ('run rabbit') = to escape from prison, to run away; **waka mimi** (*waka* = vehicle, *mimi* = urine) = the van driven by the officers who carry out urinalysis upon inmates as part of the Department of Corrections' drugs monitoring system; **whare** (house) = a cell; and **wharekuri** (kennel) = a cell belonging to a Mongrel Mob Member (see previously).⁵⁶

The majority of Pacific Island terminology is Samoan-derived, reflecting the large Samoan population resident in New Zealand, especially in Auckland. Examples of Samoan prison argot used in New Zealand include: **no fefe** = **no effect**, an expression displaying indifference to a given threat or negative situation, conveying emotional security and a lack of concern or upset; **one hundred percent soli** or **one hundred percent uso** (*soli* = the boys; *uso* = brother) = someone totally loyal and supportive to his friend; **ainga** (also **a'iga** or **aiga**) (extended family) = a group of inmates who are very close friends.

⁵⁶ P.M. Ryan ed. *The Reed Dictionary of Modern Māori* (Second Edition.) Auckland: Reed Books, 1997.

3.6 GENDER DIFFERENCES

There are similarities between the argot used by men and women in prison, largely due to the fact that these men and women may have mixed in similar criminal circles prior to imprisonment and, at a basic level, undergo related processes of resocialisation in the prison environment. However, specific differences may be noted between the argot used by men and that used by women, which arise, essentially, from each group's contrasting responses to incarceration. As an inmate's language is shaped by his or her process of resocialisation within the total institution, variations of that process will inevitably produce differing forms of, and approaches to, the antilanguage that the inmate acquires. Although all inmates experience the same fundamental process regardless of gender, the process of resocialisation for women is distinct from that of men. Women's reasons for incarceration are different, as are their behavioural profiles within the institution. They are subject to different pressures within the prison environment, and the gap existing between prison life and life on the outside is realised in different ways.

The chief reason why women's responses to incarceration differ from men's is directly linked to the inmate's life experiences before coming to prison; specifically, the discrepancy between the degree of personal autonomy experienced by female offenders as opposed to male offenders. In pursuing such an argument, one is necessarily making generalisations; however these cannot be avoided in describing established trends present in the male and female prison populations. Typically, in comparison to men, prior to entering prison women offenders have had a greatly diminished degree of autonomy, and have often been the objects of violence or abuse. Suzanne Beri's research in this area reveals that: 'at least 80% of the women in New Zealand prisons have been raped and sexually abused; and that when physical, psychological and emotional abuse are taken into account, the figure is likely to be as high as 100%.⁵⁷ Therefore, a substantial number of women offenders entering the prison system have since childhood suffered victimisation, destructive relationships, loss of self-esteem and self-control, diminished ability to think for themselves, and physical injury; their lives have become unmanageable and chaotic. This is certainly

⁵⁷ S. Beri. Findings from *Justice for Women*, in R. Bungay. *Scarecrows: Why Women Kill* (Auckland: Random House, 1998) 138.

not to suggest that men in prison have not been subject to various forms of abuse; however, as research both in New Zealand and overseas has indicated: 'In general, in comparison to male prisoners, incarcerated women report more often a history of physical and sexual abuse and suicidal thoughts.'⁵⁸ In addition, although women may be active criminals by themselves or with others, the majority of crimes committed by women tend to be reactive;⁵⁹ either against, in collaboration with, or under instruction from, men. Many women may commit crimes in conjunction with a husband or boyfriend, or as an associate of a male-dominated gang. In the case of much violent women's crime, the man is the target, and the crime is usually in response to that man's abuse of the offender.⁶⁰ As a result, women offenders have been powerless in many ways, and their prison sentences often grant them a reprieve from the violence or subjugation of their former lives. As lawyer Greg King points out:

In my professional dealings with men and women serving lengthy sentences of imprisonment, I have observed that whereas men tend to become institutionalised, women usually do not. The sad reality is that many women who find themselves imprisoned for a long time come from abusive backgrounds and abusive relationships. Paradoxically, in prison such a woman has more freedom and autonomy than when she was on the outside with her abusive partner.⁶¹

The former Manager of Christchurch Women's Prison, Cecelia Lashlie, also states that:

It is common to hear women declare upon their arrival in prison that this is the first time in their lives that they have been given permission to think for themselves about what they might want to be different ... It is no way ideal that women should have to come to prison to feel their first sense of personal freedom; indeed it is an indictment on our society.⁶²

Consequently, women respond to their incarceration differently from men, perceiving their removal from a difficult situation as an opportunity to focus upon themselves, to develop their self-knowledge, and subsequently, their self-empowerment. Therefore, women tend to be more relaxed about being in prison, which paradoxically, opens doors, rather than closing them.

⁵⁸ Cynthia Coll et. al. 'The Experience of Women in Prison: Implications for Services and Prevention.' Judy Harden and Marcia Hill ed. *Breaking the Rules: Women in Prison and Feminist Therapy* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1998) 13.

⁵⁹ J. Jordan in Bungay, 99.

⁶⁰ J. Pollock-Byrne. *Women, Prison, and Crime* (Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1990) 62.

⁶¹ G. King in Bungay, 54-55.

⁶² C. Lashlie in Bungay, 185-186.

Conversely, prior to entering prison, men generally experience a great deal of agency and autonomy. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, men are less likely to be the primary caregivers for their children, and consequently have fewer family responsibilities and greater freedom of movement;⁶³ secondly, those men in family relationships tend to be in charge emotionally, sexually and physically, and are the chief perpetrators of domestic violence;⁶⁴ thirdly, men are more likely to be in paid employment,⁶⁵ and thus enjoy greater financial independence; and fourthly, those men who are members of gangs automatically assume positions of power and have considerable status over women affiliated to the gang. The majority of male offenders are active criminals who commit crimes of their own volition. Therefore, when men come to prison, they exhibit a response to incarceration that is almost the opposite to that of women. Whereas women are inclined to see their prison sentences as a fresh opportunity for change, men tend to feel restricted, controlled and disenfranchised. This gives rise to defiance, tension, anger and frustration among male inmates, which may be directed either at the staff or at their fellow inmates, and leads them to display quite different behaviours from women. For example, eruptions of violence are much more prevalent in men's institutions, as is rivalry between inmates, the inability of male inmates to admit weakness or to convey emotions, and an oppositional attitude to the prison staff.

At the same time, however, male inmates also experience stronger feelings of solidarity and form closer social networks than do women. Because the majority of male offenders have been active criminals, they have had greater opportunities to engage with criminal subcultures and to build up contacts and acquaintances; thus upon arrival in prison, several inmates may already be known to an inmate. In the case of gang-members, this is almost certain; most gangs function like families, and a gang-affiliated new inmate may find that he meets familiar people, fits into the established hierarchy, and forms new ties almost immediately. The resentment and

⁶³ Figures from the most recent prison census show that, for male sentenced inmates, only 31% were looking after at least one child on their own before entering prison, compared to 75% of female sentenced inmates. *Census of Prison Inmates 1999*, 37.

⁶⁴ In the year ending 30 June 1997, men were the offenders in 86.7% of family violence incidents. *New Zealand Police Statistics* (Wellington, Office of the Commissioner: New Zealand Police, 1997).

⁶⁵ Figures from the most recent prison census show that 41% of male sentenced inmates were in paid employment prior to entering prison, compared to only 15% of female sentenced inmates. *Census of Prison Inmates 1999*, 35.

anti-administration sentiments felt by most of the male inmates means that fraternalisation is more strongly apparent; male inmates tend to be collaborative and to band together against the opposing presence of the prison officials, reinforcing group solidarity, and strengthening social ties. In this atmosphere, men also tend to become institutionalised much more easily than their female counterparts.

As a result, the use of boobslang is much more prevalent among male inmates. Their propensity to become institutionalised means that they internalise the prison world, using language to a greater extent in order to construct a concrete reality within the walls. By becoming institutionalised, the male inmates automatically identify as prison inmates, and their unique language functions as a mark of their distinct identity. Simultaneously, the men's close social networks also give rise to language creation and maintenance, especially in the case of the vernacular (boobslang). By contrast, female inmates tend to be more individualistic, being more isolated prior to entering prison, and encouraged during their sentences to be increasingly introspective and self-focused as part of their therapy and rehabilitation. Thus, women do not form the same social ties as men and use vernacular forms less frequently. Jennifer Coates discusses gender differences and this relationship between the informal organisation of a group and the use of vernacular in terms of the 'social network theory,' as she explains:

The concept of the social network, which enables us to see the individual in relation to the group clearly refines our understanding of gender differences in language. The evidence is that a tight-knit network structure is an important mechanism of language maintenance. Men's speech in many speech communities is closer to the vernacular than women's, and we can see that it is the close-knit social networks to which men have traditionally belonged which serve to maintain vernacular speech norms. Women's speech, then, is closer to the standard not because women are deliberately aiming at Standard English but because the less tight-knit networks to which women belong are less efficient at enforcing vernacular norms.⁶⁶

Because men in prison use boobslang to a greater extent than women, the comparison between men's and women's boobslang is perhaps most clearly seen by discussing the features or terminology strongly present in the men's boobslang that are rare or absent in women's usage.

⁶⁶ J. Coates. *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language* (Second Edition.) (London: Longman, 1993) 100.

There are a number of words and expressions that are very common in men's prisons that have virtually no currency in women's prisons. Due to the increased amount of tension and aggression among the male prison population, words for weapons feature strongly, such as: **blade, boob cosh, clunk, dolly, rod, shank, and shiv or shivvy**. The same is true of words and expressions relating to different methods of violent assault; for example: **boot party, bullrush, blanket (job), cape, gang bang or gang bash, ping over, PWK, rumble out, sandwich, top and tail, and towel**.

The perception that women allow more open displays of emotion than men, which is partly cultural and partly stereotypical, is balanced by the parallel view that men tend to repress or deny their feelings, remaining aloof, and displaying emotion through aggression.⁶⁷ In men's prisons, such an approach serves a practical purpose, preventing the inmate from being seen as weak and being targeted by his fellow inmates. Aloofness and aggression also serve as an emotional self-defence; by refusing to become too close to a fellow inmate, the inmate safeguards himself against being emotionally hurt if his friend turns on him in a volatile environment, or is released from prison. This defensive emotional wall that presents an impersonal façade to the inmate group is known as a **mask**, and the act of consciously adopting this **mask** is known as **masking up**. The physical extension of this **mask** is manifested in a style of walk called a **boob walk** where the upper body muscles are tensed and extended to create a tougher and more intimidating posture. Because of the particular posture adopted, the inmate's arms jut out, as if he is carrying some invisible object under his arms. Inmates have devised a large number of terms to describe the **boob walk** based on the invisible object that the inmate may be carrying, so that he may be said to have **baseballs, basketballs, golfballs, kinas, pumpkins, softballs, tennis balls, tomatoes, or watermelons** under his arms. **Masking up** does not appear in women's vocabulary, but is so important for men that it is overlexicalised. If men do not **mask up**, or they let the **mask** drop, they are labelled as **broken**, or **broken arsed**.

The men's vocabulary also reveals strong feelings of homophobia, manifested in the many derogatory terms for homosexuals, such as **bum boy, chutney ferret, dirt**

⁶⁷ Pollock-Byrne, 71-72.

track rider, gonzo, nonce, shit digger or shit pusher, and turd bender. Male inmates tend to be wary of homosexuals or anything perceived as homosexual behaviour as any contact with such a person could expose them to similar labelling, and therefore create a greater likelihood of physical abuse, harassment or sexual assault. The presence of a homosexual combined with sexual deprivation can also lead inmates to question their sexuality and therefore possibly lead to even more homophobia. Homophobia as reflected in prison argot is largely confined to males; the few terms women use for lesbians tend to be humorous, or affectionate, like **dolly** and **darl**. These terms tend to be less specifically related to the sexual act and have more to do with feelings, possibly because women in prison tend not to feel sexually threatened by their fellow inmates.

Significantly, most of the terms that relate to lesbian women come from men's prisons, as male inmates frequently speculate upon the lesbian activities indulged in by the female inmates. Women's prisons are almost exclusively described according to the sexual nature or sexual orientation of their inmates; for example: **Cunt Castle** = Mount Eden Women's Prison; **leleland** = a women's prison (from **lele** = a lesbian); and **Lickerland** = a women's prison. Similarly, almost all of the men's words for lesbians concern tongues, licking and genitalia, referring to the basic lesbian sexual activity of oral sex; for example: **clitty licker, envelope licker, flapcracker, mickey licker, poison tongue, and tongue lizard or tonguer.** A common insult to a female prison officer is to tell her to 'get a **licence to lick.**'

This sexual objectification of women is continued by the men in their descriptions of women in general. The men's language reflects and sustains the traditional masculine orientation; women, when described, are often designated as promiscuous and of little value, as seen with terms such as: **bitch, muck hole, TC (Tunnel Cunt), tunnel ram, and wench.** The sexual nature of the terms for women reflects their depersonalised function. Possibly this is because, amongst the male inmate group, women are perceived as outsiders and therefore inferior.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Moore, xx.

Finally, there are some aspects of prison life that are labelled by both men and women; however, each group assigns their own stereotypically 'male' or 'female' label to the referent. For example, the rectum in its capacity as a place to store and smuggle contraband is known by the men as a **boot**, a **Cadillac**, or a **Mini**; whereas the women refer to the vagina in a similar capacity as a **handbag** or a **glory box**. In other cases, in the men's prison, there may be an aspect of the prison environment that occupies a particular place or plays a particular role in the organisation and functioning of the inmate society, which is also found in the women's prison, but in a slightly different capacity, and with a different label; for example, the interesting similarity between the **kid fucker** of the men's prison and the **kid killer** of the women's prison. The **kid fucker**, or paedophile, is commonly found in the men's prison because his crime is almost exclusively a male one, while the **kid killer**, or person convicted of infanticide, is much more common in the women's prison, because the crime is associated with women, usually as a result of post-natal depression. Both occupy similar despised status within their respective populations.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Boobslang is an intriguing and socially significant aspect of the culture of New Zealand prison inmates. The New Zealand prison society shares much in common with prison societies overseas and conforms to the model of a total institution and, most importantly, an antisociety. The boobslang spoken by the inmates may be defined as an antilanguage, featuring relexicalisation and overlexicalisation as its two main characteristic elements. The acquisition of boobslang is an integral component of an inmate's resocialisation in the prison environment. As well as helping him to identify as a prison inmate and build solidarity with his peers, boobslang has an important function in helping to order, categorise and make sense of the inmate's physical and social environment, in communicating and maintaining social norms, effecting social control, serving a practical purpose as a secret code, and providing creativity and humour to alleviate the austerity and monotony of prison life. To a large extent, boobslang is a distinctively New Zealand variety of prison argot, reflecting the unique mixture of cultural stimuli that construct New Zealand culture. Despite the fact that a number of boobslang terms are common to all New Zealand

prisons, boobslang has developed differently in men's and women's prisons, as a result of each gender's different responses to incarceration and resocialisation, with men using boobslang to a much greater extent due to their stronger identification as criminals, their closer social networks, and their propensity to become institutionalised. This strengthens the view that boobslang is an inherent part of an inmate's criminal or prison identity, and therefore a chief aspect of prison life.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In compiling a comprehensive lexicon of New Zealand prison argot, I wished to incorporate as varied a range of sources as possible. Therefore, I decided to undertake a nationwide study, with the aim of providing an amalgamated prison vocabulary that would reflect most accurately the language and culture of prison inmates in New Zealand in the period 1996 to 2000. To my knowledge, such a nationwide project has never before been attempted, either in New Zealand or overseas, but it was possible because of New Zealand's compact geography, low population and consequent small number of prisons.

Previous researchers of prison language and culture have generally taken one of four approaches. The first is for the inmate himself to carry out his own research during his sentence, noting down the terminology he encounters in the prison environment, and compiling a glossary, as seen with Tempest (1950), 'Thirty Five' (1950), and Newbold (1978, 1982). These studies vary in size from brief lists of argot to dictionary-length accounts, incorporating terms from the different prisons in which the inmate has spent time. The second approach is for the researcher to undertake a superficial study of a single institution, gathering information informally from one individual, or a small group of respondents. Such studies are very brief, containing a short glossary and a commentary that tends to be descriptive rather than analytical, and are normally published as articles in sociological, criminological or linguistic journals, for example, Morgan (1981), Lyons (1984), Karhu (1988), Schofield (1991), Rickerby (1993) and Wittenberg (1996). Usually these authors are not lexicographers or sociolinguists, but are employed in the prison in some capacity, for example, as a teacher, chaplain or social worker, and have collected the argot terms while at work. The third approach takes the form of an in-depth and long-term study of a particular prison community, carried out by an external academic researcher, such as Clemmer's sociological portrait of a major Mid-Western American prison (1940), Giallombardo's analysis of the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson, West Virginia (1966), and Cardozo-Freeman's comprehensive folk-ethnography of Walla Walla Prison in

Washington State (1984). The glossaries contained in these studies are often quite comprehensive and significant, but are not the primary focus of research. The fourth approach comprises a more general survey of language in several prisons of a particular type or in a particular region, drawing from a substantial number of inmate respondents, for example, Beckner's 1994 study of four prisons in the Appalachian region of the United States, and Devlin's 1996 study of several British (mainly women's) prisons.

For this project, this last approach was the most useful and appropriate. I undertook research in all 18 of New Zealand's prisons over a period of 3½ years between September 1996 and March 2000. I interviewed a total of 170 male and female inmates, with a wide variety of criminal and ethnic backgrounds and different security classifications,¹ and collected approximately 3,000 boobslang words and expressions.

4.2 INITIAL APPROACH

I contacted each prison initially through the Department of Corrections Head Office Communications Unit in Wellington. I sent an outline of the project, along with information about the range of inmates I required, the estimated time frame for research, and my particular research needs. Head Office then notified the Regional Managers for each part of the country and I made contact with them shortly afterward. Each Regional Manager notified the Site Managers at the various prisons in his or her region, and I followed this up by contacting each Site Manager personally, organising dates for the research trip, and forwarding a copy of the project outline. Along with the project outline, I also forwarded a poster to be displayed around the prison, advertising the project to the inmates. Normally, the Site Manager would delegate another member of the prison staff to liaise with me, such as the Education Coordinator, Client Services Manager, or Operations Advisor, prior to my entering the prison and during the research period. It was this liaison person who was responsible for arranging a timetable for interviews with the selected inmates. Times for interviewing were to be based around the availability of inmates outside of work,

¹ Discussed in more detail in the Demography of Sample Interviewed.

programmes, meal times, lock-up times, or any other regularly scheduled activities. Upon entering the prison, I met with my liaison, the Unit Managers and prison officers to discuss final details and prison rules and regulations concerning my visit.

4.3 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

As the aim of the project was to gather as varied a selection of argot as possible, the interviewees were not chosen at random, but were carefully selected according to criteria based upon age, amount of time spent in prison, criminal and ethnic backgrounds, and use of language. Because I was unfamiliar with the inmates, it was necessary for people in the prison environment to select appropriate interviewees according to my criteria. Chiefly, this was undertaken by the prison officers who had worked with the inmates for several years. This process of selection is similar to that carried out by other researchers, such as Cardozo-Freeman, who balanced her interviews with a ratio of different ethnic groups and a wide range of criminal backgrounds and personalities, and Beckner, who included racial demographics in his sample, and restricted his interviewees to those inmates who had served at least 10 years in the prison systems of their respective states. Although not all of my interviewees had served long periods, due to the fact that I wanted to include young inmates in order to record the argot of their generation, I asked that the majority of my sample be made up of inmates who had served a considerable amount of time in prison, either within their current sentence, or during a number of previous sentences. These so-called **old lagers** were *au fait* with prison language and culture, and in addition to their familiarity with boobslang, they were able to provide further information about the origins of some boobslang terms, explain criminal lore and inmate codes of behaviour, and even direct me to useful secondary sources. It was also important to interview inmates with different security classifications, as to focus on any one part of the security classification continuum would present skewed data. In addition, I requested inmates who had been members of criminal subcultures before entering prison and/or between sentences, as a significant amount of prison argot finds its way into the language of criminal subcultures, and the specific language of these groups is often imported into the prison environment and gains popularity there.

Besides the officers selecting appropriate interviewees, however, once some inmates had been interviewed and were satisfied with the project, they themselves recommended suitable inmates in that prison and in other prisons. I welcomed and encouraged this. This prison 'old boys' network proved to be very useful in building the inmates' trust and finding knowledgeable respondents; in some cases, the recommended inmate already knew I was coming before I reached his prison.

Procuring inmate assistance was a strategy also adopted by Cardozo-Freeman. She enlisted the help of trusted, long-term inmate Eugene P. Delorme, whose chief job was to choose appropriate inmate respondents. Beckner, too, took advantage of the inmates' inside knowledge, as he explains:

These inmates [initial respondents] in turn recruited others who met the criteria and promoted their involvement with the project. In this way, the prisoners became co-researchers, committed to the success of the project and thus approached the interviews strongly predisposed to contribute to the data.²

Although I never asked for any type of inmate *not* to be included in the sample, I did request that child molesters be kept to a minimum, and only included in cases where the inmate was very experienced with prison life, or had gained widespread acceptance amongst the prison population. There were three reasons for this. Firstly, the child molester's crimes are committed as a sole agent, and he does not belong to any criminal subculture that uses argot on a daily basis before entering prison, unlike a gang-member or a professional thief, which restricts his experience with, and knowledge of, such language. Secondly, the child molester tends to be ostracised while in prison and segregated from the mainstream population, and is therefore not aware of much of the language being coined or used regularly by his fellow inmates. Thirdly, many child molesters do not conceive of themselves as 'criminals,' and do not identify with being in prison. Consequently, they make little or no effort to learn or use boobslang. As a result of these factors, I found that in general, such inmates were not committed to the project, and of limited use.

² W. T. Beckner. 'Pulling Time in Appalachia: A Comparative Study of Prison Argot.' (Diss. University of Tennessee, 1994) 59.

4.4 DATA COLLECTION: THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

An average of 10 inmates were interviewed at each prison. I spent between one and two weeks at each prison on various research trips over the 3½ year period. During the research period, I became familiar with each prison environment, and got to know the staff and the inmates interviewed. During one visit I remained at the prison site for the entire research period, staying with the Prison Nurse at Ohura. I interviewed each inmate individually, sometimes in a separate interview room, and at other times in the visiting room, in the schoolroom, or wherever space could be found. No officers were present during the interviews, which lasted between two and seven hours each.

This approach is similar to that of previous researchers such as Cardozo-Freeman, who entered Walla Walla prison as an academic researcher for a 2½ year period from 1978-1980,³ and Beckner, who had worked previously as a prison chaplain, but entered his four subject prisons purely as an academic researcher over a six-month period between July 1993 and January 1994.⁴ It was this approach that seemed the most appropriate for conducting research such as my own. An extensive sociological and psychological observation of, and personal integration into, prison life such as that undertaken by Clemmer (1940) and Giallombardo (1966), I felt was unnecessary, as my purpose was specifically language-oriented. I did not, however, wish to follow the example of Devlin (1996), who did not actually enter the prison or talk to inmates directly to gather her information, but posted a questionnaire in the inmate newspaper, *Inside Time*. For my project, such an approach was too unreliable; it was important to interview inmates personally so as to gain a first-hand understanding of prison language and culture.

When interviewing inmates personally for the purposes of gathering lexical information, it is important to conduct structured interviews with a substantial, carefully chosen sample. Beckner advocates systematic data gathering when he points out that:

The norm, at least as reported in [past] individual studies, is for the researcher to informally collect terms while going about a normal work routine within the institution.

³ I. Cardozo-Freeman. *The Joint: Language and Culture in a Maximum Security Prison* (Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1984) xi.

⁴ Beckner, 63-64.

Such a methodology is neither replicable nor verifiable. More importantly, in several cases, the authors of such reports identify only one or two inmates as sources of data.⁵

Therefore, for my research, it was necessary to devise a logical methodology that could be reproduced, as a way of gathering reliable information.

As part of this systematic data gathering, I chose to conduct my interviews using a wordlist and a questionnaire.⁶ The wordlist was based upon the glossary published in Greg Newbold's prison autobiography, *The Big Huey* (1982), as before my current research was undertaken, it was the largest and most accurate list of New Zealand prison argot available. During the research carried out in the Canterbury Regional prisons – which by virtue of being my first prison interviews took the form of pilot studies – I updated the list and enlarged it to incorporate approximately 500 terms and expressions. Apart from minor modifications, this was the list that I used for the remainder of the interviews.

The terms and expressions on my wordlist were not in the form of a single alphabetised list, but were arranged specifically so as to elicit as much information as possible about the language and the prison culture that creates and informs it. When gathering spoken data, one inevitably encounters the 'Observer's Paradox.' As William Labov explains: 'the aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain this data by systematic observation.'⁷ Labov suggests that proponents of ethnographic semantics might argue for the necessity of daily observation of language behaviour over an extended period of time; however, in his 1994 study, Beckner argues that one may generate linguistic data descriptive of the informant's culture by asking certain critical questions.⁸ For his data collection purposes, Beckner developed an interview guide focusing upon several areas of prison life, based on authoritative sources⁹ and on his own work in the prison. These areas included: Physical Locations and Objects; Institutional Rules; People within the Institution; Institutional Activities; 'Free-World' Concerns; and Trial and Legal Issues. Beckner used this guide to

⁵ *ibid.*, 50-51.

⁶ See Appendices B and C respectively for copies of these documents.

⁷ W. Labov. *Sociolinguistic Patterns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972) 209.

⁸ Beckner, 54.

⁹ Beckner's chief source was Edward Hall's indices of culture discussed in *The Silent Language*, 1973.

encourage conversation and collect argot terms. When terms were elicited, he asked for further information and elaboration. My wordlist was arranged in a similar way, according to the chief semantic categories of the boobslang terms on the list. These categories were: Places and Procedures; Sentences and Crimes; Authority Figures; Inmate Relations/Types; Gang-Related Words; Drugs; Business (generally words for types of contraband, and the means by which such items may be smuggled in and out of prison); and Other, a miscellaneous category, containing mainly rhyming slang terms related to arbitrary topics. The inmates' responses were based mainly around the recognition of the words listed in each category, and the wordlist arrangement acted to jog the inmate's memory to help him remember further terms or information related to these chief aspects of prison life. Conversation could develop from either a category or a specific word; for example, if an inmate was concentrating upon the category devoted to drug terminology, in addition to commenting upon the terms on the list, he also tended to volunteer information about the drug culture in prison; recipes for manufacturing drugs; ways to build devices for taking drugs; or the relationship between different words listed in that category. Such background information would not have been as easily accessible if the terms had been arranged in a single alphabetised list.

In administering the wordlist, I asked each inmate if he recognised the term on the list.

- if he did, I asked him to look at the corresponding definition and to indicate whether the two matched, i.e. were both term and definition correct?
- if both term and definition were correct, I placed a tick beside the printed term and its definition to indicate that the word was part of the inmate's prison vocabulary
- if the definition was not correct, I crossed out the printed one and wrote in the new meaning for the term beside it
- if he did not recognise the term on the list, I asked the inmate to look at its corresponding definition and to say whether he used an alternative term that matched that definition
- if he did, I wrote in the new term beside the definition

- if he did not, I placed a cross beside the printed term and its definition to indicate that the word was not part of the inmate's prison vocabulary.

In addition:

- I added any additional terms remembered by the inmate
- I noted any extra information relevant to the term on the list next to the appropriate word or expression.

This wordlist method proved to be effective for a number of reasons. It enabled me to record inmates' responses to a large number of words related to various aspects of prison life. It allowed for a concrete comparison of the boobslang used by various interviewees, enabling me to gauge effectively similarities and differences between individual inmates, prisons and regions. It also helped me assemble a more accurate record of boobslang, as I could ask the inmates specific questions about their language and make improvements, corrections and modifications to my existing data easily and efficiently. Finally, when dealing with an antilanguage, the wordlist was a useful tool for yielding a great number of terms. Because overlexicalisation is one of the key features of an antilanguage, the wordlist listed one or more synonymous terms related to a given thing, which then led to the inmate's recollection of a number of related synonymous terms.

Occasionally, I made modifications to the wordlist. These modifications were only minor, and were made in the following circumstances: a word on the list was omitted because it was discovered either to be used more generally outside prison, or to be a nonce word; it was added because a term had been mentioned several times in one prison and I wanted to check its currency in other prisons; or it was changed because the original spelling or definition was obviously wrong and had been corrected by several inmates, so was rectified for the next research trip. In this way, I was able to improve the stimulus material and to make it more reliable as the research progressed.

The second part of the interview material consisted of a questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 15 questions relating to the inmates' use of boobslang, in an attempt to investigate the relationship between prison argot and prison culture. Inmates were asked to describe situations in which they would or would not use

boobslang; linguistic taboos; reasons for using boobslang; the relationship of boobslang to the social organisation of the inmate population; and the extent to which boobslang was perceived as an identity marker. Inmates provided written responses to these questions.

There were several positive aspects of the questionnaire. The written work provided a balance to the oral responses elicited while examining the wordlist, and the fact that the inmate had the option of working on the questionnaire in his own time gave him time to formulate his responses, and allowed greater opportunities for elaboration and illustration. The questionnaire also facilitated discussion, both with me and with other inmates; on several occasions, the inmates' friends had also looked at the questionnaire and contributed words and ideas. The questionnaire also presented the chance for follow-up interviews, during which I could return to the wordlist interview to check or clarify any of the inmate's responses.

There were, however, also various problems with the questionnaire's design and its administration. On numerous occasions when an inmate chose to take the questionnaire away with him, he lost the questionnaire, or was not motivated to complete it on his own. Other inmates who were orally adept had literacy problems, and wrote inadequate responses. Others simply produced silly responses. I found that in many cases, the inmates wrote fuller responses when they stayed in the interview room and could ask me to explain or elaborate upon any aspects that they did not understand. Some inmates wished to have all the questions explained; however, this posed difficulties in that I had to avoid putting words in their mouths. When faced with questions such as 'Is that right answer, Miss?' I told them that there was no right or wrong, and that they were to write from their own point of view, based on their experience. Therefore, having the inmate remain in the interview room allowed me to gather better responses, but created its own difficulties and removed some of the benefits of his taking the questionnaire away.

Eventually I decided upon a compromise, which set the precedent for the remainder of the research. The questionnaire became the basis for a discussion about boobslang and its functions in the prison environment. Generally, for each section, the inmate wrote a summary of what was discussed. Occasionally, if the inmate had writing

difficulties, I wrote down what the inmate dictated. I felt that to do this was preferable to omitting an excellent interviewee with a comprehensive knowledge of boobslang simply on the grounds that he was unable to write clearly and effectively. At the conclusion of the interview, the inmate was given the option of taking a copy of the questionnaire or the wordlist back to the wing to gather contributions from fellow inmates if he so wished, and returning the material to me later.

In addition to gathering information directly from the wordlist and the questionnaire, I recorded quotations and wrote down any extra information mentioned by the inmate either as it occurred, or shortly after the interview. In a few cases, this information did not come from the interviewees, but was noted during direct or overheard conversations with other inmates about the prison. This approach was used successfully by Newbold in his 1978 study of Paremoremo Prison, as he explains:

Conversations and comments were recorded in writing. Some of these were recorded during direct interviews, some were overheard and written down immediately, others were comments made mental note of during everyday conversation, and recorded as soon as possible afterwards.... On a few occasions the gist of conversations was recorded in note form and reconstructed later.¹⁰

Giallombardo also used a similar technique in her 1966 study of the Federal Reformatory for Women at Alderson. She writes that she: 'took notes in the inmate's presence in these [interview] sessions,' and at other times she: 'wrote up the notes from memory at home if [she] was leaving the prison immediately, or made notes in the ladies' room shortly thereafter.'¹¹ Many of the remarks that I recorded during conversation occur in the lexicon as usage examples, as explanatory comments, or as part of the cultural notes appended to the definitions. However, as I was not as familiar with my respondents as Newbold and Giallombardo were with theirs, I was careful not to take liberties with the material, and made an effort to record verbatim as much as possible.

¹⁰ Newbold. 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' 419.

¹¹ Giallombardo, 197-8.

4.5 THE TAPE-RECORDER ISSUE

One method of data collection that has proved popular with several prison language researchers, such as Maurer, Cardozo-Freeman and Beckner, is the tape-recorded interview. Unlike these researchers, I chose not to use a tape-recorder for my data collection. There were several important reasons for this.

- In prison, there are severe restrictions placed upon the use of tape-recorders to gather information from inmates,¹² as the recording could identify a particular inmate, or the information given on the tape could potentially be used adversely against the inmate himself, his fellow inmates, or the Department of Corrections. Although tape-recorders are permitted in certain cases, conducting the research without one made it much easier to gain access to the prisons and to secure the co-operation of prison authorities and inmates.
- As an interviewer in a prison, the good rapport one naturally attempts to establish with an inmate interviewee would be hampered by the presence of a tape-recorder. Because the scope of the project was such that I met with a large number of interviewees, I was unable to spend much time getting to know and obtaining the trust of each individual. Therefore, it was imperative that the interviewee be comfortable with the interview arrangement from the beginning. Most inmates are distrustful of having their voices recorded. Many inmates have had their places of work or residence bugged by the police, or have been taped during conversations with 'wired' undercover police officers, and their recorded statements have been instrumental in their arrests and subsequent convictions. Inmates are aware that the prison is monitored by security cameras, and therefore many believe that areas of the prison may also contain recording devices planted by police or prison officers to catch inmates involved in illegal activities. The general rule against **narking** also means that inmates are ill-disposed to leave any permanent record of their conversation. In addition, inmates are used to having people con and trick them, and as a result they are understandably wary about having anything committed to tape and out of their control. Therefore, the interviewees were in a vulnerable situation, which needed to be respected, and an appropriate method of data

¹² In fact, any recording device is illegal in the institution; inmates have to remove the recording devices from their stereos.

collection used. Many inmates agreed to the interview only when they knew they were not going to be recorded. A number of inmates checked the walls, the ceiling and under the desk for hidden microphones. With the wordlist/questionnaire format, the interviewees felt much more relaxed about sharing information and spoke freely from the beginning of the interview. Comparing other prison glossaries with the glossary produced from this study, I feel the wealth of information appearing here is a reflection of the subjects' lack of inhibitions due to the absence of a tape-recorder.

- I also chose not to use a tape-recorder for reasons of economy and practicality, based upon the aims and parameters of the study. Those previous researchers of prison argot who used recorded interviews tended to have a small number of easily accessible interviewees. As this study was nationwide and involved a large number of subjects, I needed interview material that yielded its results immediately, could be compared easily with other interviews, and did not incorporate hours of transcription work. Beckner, for example, produced 952 pages of transcripts from only 26 inmates, and Cardozo-Freeman had to wade through 2,000 pages of transcribed narrative material taken from her select informants. The job of transcribing 170 conversations of several hours' duration would be hugely time-consuming, large sections of the transcription would be irrelevant to the project, and each transcription would contain a randomly organised individual account of prison argot that could not be easily compared with other similar interviews. Despite the verbatim record, a recorded interview presents its own pitfalls with accuracy; Beckner, for example, had problems with misheard terms on transcripts. Thus, the wordlist and questionnaire methodology saves time, and keeps the relevant data tight and cohesive.
- A tape-recorded conversation does not always provide a sufficiently concrete base from which to gather lexical information. The majority of my subject sample were long-term prison inmates to whom boobslang was so familiar that it was used unconsciously. Therefore, it would have been difficult to confront an inmate in an interview situation and ask him to give a lexical account of his argot with little or no stimulus, as he would first have to understand his everyday boobslang as being divorced from standard English,

and would then have to think of all the contexts in which boobslang occurred so as to provide appropriate examples. Thus, even a lengthy conversation may be unlikely to yield many boobslang terms, whereas the wordlist enabled the inmate to give his opinion on 500 different boobslang terms and definitions. I acknowledge that providing an inmate with 'ready made' examples of boobslang would potentially make it easier for him to claim that he used a term when he did not; however, each inmate was frequently asked to elaborate upon a definition, use a term in a sentence, or give examples of situations in which the term was used. The same material was also checked with other inmates. The research was therefore very structured; although the recorded conversation may be useful for gathering information about prison culture, it is not the most effective means of collecting specific lexical items.

- Among sociolinguists, much is made of the importance of eliciting natural speech when obtaining spoken data from informants. Hearing the informant's speech used in its natural context allows for a more objective and accurate analysis. The most popular method of collecting samples of natural speech is, of course, the recorded interview; however, the overall effectiveness of this method relies upon the informant's ability to forget about the microphone. Therefore, although the recorded interview is excellent for phonological research and analysis, and for ethnographical investigation, it is not so effective in the gathering of lexical information. Every time the interviewee used a boobslang term I would have had to stop him and ask him about the definition of the term, thus constantly reminding him of the presence of the microphone and interrupting the flow of natural speech.

I am not implying that the tape-recorded interview is a completely ineffective way to elicit lexical information from prison inmates, as it has been proven effective in many instances, albeit with a small subject sample and plenty of time to spend with each informant. Rather, for the purposes of this particular study, the wordlist and questionnaire was the preferred option, and was most successful and reliable: setting the interviewees at ease, enabling me to gather a large number of words, and allowing greater opportunities for comparison and double-checking, without the copious paperwork associated with transcribed interviews.

4.6 ATTITUDE

In the majority of cases, the inmates' response to the interviews was positive. Understandably, several were initially wary about the project and its possible implications, especially in whose hands the information disclosed might end up and what it might be used for. The 'no **narking**' rule tended to be a natural inhibitor, as no inmate wanted to risk the suspicion or criticism of his peers. However, when the aims and structure of the interview were explained fully, almost all of the suggested interviewees were happy to participate.

Throughout the interviews and conversations with the inmates, I remained sympathetic, but objective. This is similar to the approach taken by Clemmer, who states that: 'though the writer as a human being has developed sympathy and understanding, he has made every effort ... to keep an objective, dispassionate viewpoint.'¹³ Naturally, in each interview situation, I wished to develop a rapport between the inmate and myself, and I did this by being honest, taking a genuine interest in him, promoting open communication, and by placing him in the position of an expert on boobslang. This latter approach put him, quite legitimately, in a position of prestige by giving him the advantage, rather than making him feel that he was an experiment, or was being tested in some way.

I always made sure, however, that I maintained appropriate boundaries to minimise any risks; for example, I did not disclose any personal information. As expected, the inmates wished to have clarification of my role within the prison, and were curious about who I was and where I had come from. Many were concerned to establish that I was not a reporter or a prison official in disguise. I assured them that I was not a reporter or a prison official, but a university student; I gave them the relevant details, but gave no extra information about myself or my family. I also refused to run any errands for inmates. Sometimes I was asked to carry a letter or a phonecard to an inmate in another prison; on one occasion I was asked to ferry an ounce of marijuana to a 'contact' on the **outside**; and on another occasion I was offered a marijuana joint for my own personal use. In each of these cases, I refused politely but firmly. I

¹³ D. Clemmer. *The Prison Community* (1940) (New York: Rinehart, 1958) 323.

explained that the only material I took out of the prison was material for my research, and that if I was caught taking contraband out of the prison it would compromise my integrity as a researcher and ruin my chances of conducting research in other institutions. The inmates accepted this response. Giallombardo writes in her methodology that she encountered similar questions and requests from the female inmates at Alderson.¹⁴ Her approach was the same as mine and she set the same boundaries, giving similar responses. Throughout, I maintained a professional manner, as I wished the relationship between the inmate and myself to be businesslike, not personal. A personal relationship would have created problems for the data collection; for example, I could have been placed in the position where I was given false data, through the inmate's desire either to please or to manipulate me.

Aside from the danger of being given false data, the researcher risks consciously or unconsciously becoming too sympathetic towards his or her informants. This has been described as a 'partisan' view.¹⁵ Considerable debate surrounds the advantages and disadvantages of adopting this perspective. Gresham Sykes advises against becoming 'partisan' as such an attitude may influence the data and the way in which it is presented. Cardozo-Freeman, however, takes a different approach in her study, as she explains:

Gresham Sykes warns in his book, *The Society of Captives*, that there are two serious problems a researcher confronts when attempting to study a prison culture. The first is 'the peril of being "conned" by highly articulate, glib prisoners who seek some personal advantage,' and the second is the danger of becoming 'partisan' consciously or unconsciously [and that it is] 'only by remaining firmly neutral in one's sympathies [that] a valid picture of prison life [can] be uncovered.'¹⁶ I disregarded both these warnings; indeed, I believe that being partisan was not only the key to not being conned but also the reason I was able to uncover a valid picture of prison life. In my field, one trusts those who give information about their lives; after all, they are the only people who truly know and understand their culture.¹⁷

I differ from Cardozo-Freeman and am inclined to agree with Beckner, who discusses Sykes and Cardozo-Freeman and argues that a rapport may be established and reliable data may be gained without adopting a partisan view. He comments on the merits of Cardozo-Freeman's research as a folk ethnography and a view of prison culture from 'outsiders,' but points out that her methodology 'provides something

¹⁴ Giallombardo, 193-195.

¹⁵ See, for example: Sykes, 135; Goffman, x.

¹⁶ Sykes, 135-136.

¹⁷ Cardozo-Freeman, xiii.

less than a systematic approach to a study of prison language, and Cardozo-Freeman may have crossed the line between observation and advocacy.’¹⁸ Beckner refers to Charles Frankel, who writes that:

Sympathetic identification, in short, is neither sufficient nor essential to guarantee the discovery of truth in human studies. It is not sufficient because the mistakes that people make when they think they have identified with others are notorious; it is not essential because it is possible to explain another’s behaviour without identifying with him. It would be something of a nuisance if we tried to be schizophrenic while we studied schizophrenia.¹⁹

Therefore, I felt that to maintain an objective viewpoint was essential in gathering and presenting reliable data, especially in the collation of lexical information, as my definitions needed to have authority and remain unclouded by any bias.

4.7 POST-INTERVIEW COLLATION OF DATA

As has been mentioned, some controls were placed on the data during its collection, and the same was true during its collation and entry into the lexicon. The information from each individual interview was amalgamated to provide a glossary for each prison visited, which proved useful for comparisons of data between prisons. From these glossaries, the terms were entered into the lexicon. Not every word gathered from the inmate respondents appears in the lexicon; some were nonce words, and others did not make logical sense in the context. Only those that had more than one response, made logical sense or were backed up with cultural information, were included.

For the lexicon, I conducted research into the etymologies of the boobslang terms, noted their appearance in other New Zealand and overseas prison glossaries, and cited evidence of their previous use in New Zealand texts. Many terms, of course, have never before been recorded, so sources cannot always be traced. Although I have tried to make the lexicon largely prison-specific, some terms reflect wider criminal subcultures that have an especial relation to the prison environment; for example, the gangs and the drug culture.

¹⁸ Beckner, 61.

¹⁹ C. Frankel. ‘Philosophy and the Social Sciences.’ *Both Human and Humane: The Humanities and Social Sciences in Graduate Education*. Charles E. Boewe and Roy F. Nichols ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960) 99.

4.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before my research proposal was approved by the Department of Corrections Head Office, my personal details were subject to a police-check on the Wanganui Computer to ensure that I had no previous convictions and that the statements I had made about my occupation and background were true, and to assess my general suitability for research in prisons. After the proposal had been initially approved, all appropriate Corrections Officials were notified of the project and given a copy of the proposal. The project was also well publicised by the poster displayed in each prison, which gave both staff and inmates relevant information about the study.

On first arrival at a prison, before meeting any inmates, it was usual to attend a preliminary meeting/interview with the Site and Unit Managers and a liaison official, where I briefed them personally about the nature of the study. At this stage, I was also introduced to the staff with whom I would be working. In several cases, the Site Manager took a photocopy of my interview material for the prison records.

I was scanned for weapons with a metal detector, checked for drugs, and issued with a visitor's card or photographic identification. I also had to sign several forms provided by the prison relating to my conduct within the institution, promising that I would not bring inmates unauthorised items, take photographs, or use a tape-recorder. I was also expected to protect the privacy of inmates and the institution. Throughout the research period, records were kept of who I had seen, when, where, and for how long. In the maximum-security institution at Paremoremo, I was issued with an electronic raid alarm, so that the officers could monitor my progress around the prison at all times. As officers were not present during interviews, I had to promise to abide by health and safety regulations and take precautions directed by the authorities, both for my own protection and for that of the Department of Corrections.

The inmates' participation in the study was purely voluntary; no inmate was coerced into giving information that he did not wish to divulge. At the beginning of each interview, the inmate was briefed in full about the nature of the project, and was free

to ask any questions of his own. At this point, if the inmate did not wish to continue with the interview, he was excused. Those inmates who wished to continue were first asked to sign a consent form.²⁰ The consent form had space for each inmate to include his basic details (first name, age, ethnic identity), and contained an explanation of where the material was going, what it would be used for, where it would be stored in the future, and who would be allowed access to it, thereby giving the inmate some control over the information he provided.

As well as thoroughly informing the inmate about the nature of, and implications of participating in, the research, I took pains to preserve the inmate's identity. Although inmates identified their first names (or initials) on the consent form, in the study they were anonymously labelled as Inmate A, Inmate B, etc. in each prison. Nothing about the inmate's criminal background was disclosed on the form. As each inmate's interview was amalgamated with those of his fellow inmates to form a prison glossary that was then combined with the other prison glossaries to produce the nationwide lexicon, it is virtually impossible to pinpoint any one inmate's contribution. If any inmate is mentioned in a quotation in the lexicon, his name is substituted with *x*. Any specific details about the interviewees have been given in statistical form so that no individual can be identified, as in the sample demography.

Fortunately, the Department of Corrections did not require a copy of this thesis or related material, which made it easier to ensure that the anonymity of inmates could be maintained. Given this emphasis on confidentiality, the inmates felt comfortable talking to me about their language and culture.

4.9 PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Problems arising during the data collection were few, and were almost entirely typical hazards to be anticipated when researching in a prison environment.

- I could not always interview 10 inmates from each prison. This was sometimes due to time constraints, such as interviews taking longer than

²⁰ See Appendix A for a copy of this document.

expected, or staff meetings or **lockdowns** taking time out of the day. At one prison, a gang war erupted, so the entire prison was **locked down** until the situation had been resolved, and I was denied access to any interviewees for several days. Sometimes the inmate who had been chosen was either ill, at work, or had misbehaved and was serving a sentence in **the pound** (the solitary confinement punishment cell) and could not be released for the interview; and some inmates who had initially volunteered decided not to participate.

- Occasionally, when a scheduled inmate could not or would not participate in the interview, prison staff spontaneously approached an inmate whom they felt would be suitable. Often this was successful; however, in one instance, the inmate's reaction was angry and violent.
- A number of interviewees were completely illiterate, which made the research difficult, as it was easier to conduct if the interviewees had some degree of reading and writing ability. In cases where the inmate was illiterate, I read out the wordlist and the questions, and wrote down the inmate's responses. This process was tiring but did not appear to affect the quality of information.
- A very few inmates arrived at the interview under the influence of drugs or medication, which made their contributions questionable. If an inmate was obviously drugged to the point of incoherency, then I approached an officer and asked that the inmate be escorted back to the wing.
- One inmate was released from prison before he could return his questionnaire.
- Another inmate was stabbed and hospitalised before he could return his questionnaire.
- Gang colours caused initial difficulties, as inmates who were members of the Mongrel Mob would not use blue pens to write with, only red, and vice versa for members of the Black Power. In the end, I provided black pens only, and solved the problem.
- Being a female researcher in predominantly male environment, I inevitably encountered behaviour from the inmates that may be described in some contexts as 'sexual harassment.' However, this was expected and, in general, tended to be more comical than offensive.

5 DEMOGRAPHY OF SAMPLE INTERVIEWED

Location of Inmates

Arohata Women's Prison	10
Auckland (Paremoremo) Prison	10
Christchurch (Paparua) Prison	20
Christchurch Women's Prison	6
Dunedin Prison	10
Hawke's Bay (Mangaroa) Prison	10
Invercargill Prison	10
Manawatu (Linton) Prison	10
Mount Eden Men's Prison	7
Mount Eden Women's Prison	6
New Plymouth Prison	10
Ohura Prison	10
Rimutaka Prison	9
Rolleston Prison	2
Tongariro/Rangipo Prison	10
Waikeria (Bay of Plenty Regional) Prison	10
Wanganui (Kaitoke) Prison	10
Wellington Men's (Mount Crawford) Prison	10
Total	170

Gender of Inmates

Male	147
Female	22
Transsexual	1 (male to female)
Total	170

Age of Inmates

15 – 20	15
21 – 25	27
26 – 30	38
31 – 35	25
36 – 40	32
41 – 45	11
46 – 50	7
51 – 55	8
56 – 60	4
61 – 65	2
66 – 70	1
Total	170

Ethnic Identification of Inmates

Pākehā/New Zealand European	74
New Zealand Māori	70
New Zealand Māori and NZ European	10
New Zealand Māori and Scottish	1
New Zealand Māori and Chinese	1
Samoan	3
Niuean	2
Rarotongan	2
Fijian	1
Cook Island Māori	1
Chinese	1
English	2
Dutch	1
Greek	1
Total	170

Gang Affiliation of Inmates

A significant number of the inmates interviewed were gang-members or supporters, and represented a wide variety of New Zealand's gangs. As many inmates were not forthcoming about their gang affiliation, I did not ask for this information on the consent form, and as a result, cannot provide specific statistics for this variable. Several inmates volunteered their gang affiliation during the interview, however, and agreed to have this information noted. From these records, the gangs that the interviewees represented include: Mongrel Mob; Black Power; Nomads; Headhunters; Road Knights; Rebels MC; Magogs; The Filthy Few; King Cobras; 'Homie' gangs such as the Bloods, the Crips (also spelt Crypts) and OTS (Otara Style); Asian Triads; White Power; and various skinhead factions.

Criminal Background of Inmates

As with the information about gang affiliation, criminal background was not noted on the consent form, although most of the inmates volunteered this information. From these records, the offences committed by members of the subject sample include: murder; manslaughter; physical assault; vandalism; armed robbery; aggravated robbery; burglary; other theft; fraud; rape; child abuse; prostitution; kidnapping/abduction; intimidation/threats; drug trafficking, possession or dealing; drink driving; and other traffic offences.

6 LITERATURE REVIEW

This Literature Review comprises a history of the work undertaken by lexicographers in the area of underworld language from the early sixteenth century to the present day, in order to provide a context for the following dictionary of the language used by contemporary New Zealand prison inmates. In addition to underworld and prison dictionaries or glossaries compiled in New Zealand, the review appraises works from Britain, the United States and Australia, as it is these three countries that have had the most influence upon the development and particular flavour of prison argot in New Zealand. Through a lexicographical and lexicological examination of these works, the review records a brief chronological history of underworld language: its main trends, changes and developments from country to country over five centuries. Throughout, the review also charts the directions in the interest in, and study of, underworld language; specifically, the aims and approaches of the various lexicographers who recorded these terms and their meanings, and how these lexicographers drew from and built upon those who had preceded them.

Terminology

The earliest records of any underworld language are those of *rotwalsh* (also *rotwelsh* or *rotwelshe*) devised by European vagabonds during the thirteenth century. The term *rotwalsh* is derived from Middle High German *rot* = a beggar, and *welsch* (also *wälsch*) = a strange, outlandish language.¹ A glossary of *rotwalsh* appeared about 1490. It is likely that *rotwalsh* influenced the development of varieties of cant in Europe and in Britain.

Cant, or the language of the criminal underworld, is the main precursor of our present prison argot. From records of cant language it appears that the underworld in the early sixteenth century was largely made up of tramps, beggars and vagabonds, but over the past five centuries prostitutes, pickpockets, professional burglars, confidence men, swindlers, Black Marketeers, white slavers and drug-traffickers have joined the

¹ J. Green. *Chasing the Sun: Dictionary Makers and the Dictionaries They Made* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996) 141. Subsequently cited as Green. *Chasing the Sun*.

underworld community, and cant has evolved and expanded to accommodate these varied groups. The noun *cant* derived from the verb: '[i]n the underworld of the 16th – 19th Century, *cant* meant simply 'to speak'; hence, to speak the language of the underworld'.² Cant was a secret jargon which 'contained the terms commonly used by beggars and thieves to denote the essential elements connected with their mischievous way of living; it defined their tools, the main techniques they used, the different subgroups into which the underworld was organised, and provided the names by which the various individuals were to be called.'³ Records show us that cant was in use in other European countries before there was evidence of a British variety. Cant appeared in the fourteenth century in Germany, the middle fifteenth century in France and was present in Italy and Spain by the sixteenth century. The term *argot* is often used synonymously with cant, and it is during the fifteenth century that the term originated. In France, the language of a community of swindlers and beggars in the 'kingdom of Argot' was designated *le jargon de l'Argot*, later abbreviated to *argot*. An argot glossary for this group (a collection of trade names of various categories of thieves and swindlers) dates from 1455.⁴

BRITAIN

Records of British Canting Language 1530 – 1612

The works discussed in this section are: Robert Copland's *The hyeway to the Spyttell Hous* (c.1536); John Awdeley's *Fraternitie of Vacabondes* (1561); Thomas Harman's *A Caveat for Common Cursetors, Vulgarly Called Vagabones* (1567); Robert Greene's *Conny-Catching* Pamphlets (1591-1592); Thomas Dekker's *The Belman of London* and *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (1608); S.R.'s *Martin Mark-All, Beadle of Bridewell; His Defence and Answere to the Belman of London* (1610); and Dekker's *O per se O, or a new Cryer of Lanthorne and Candle-Light* (1612).

² E. Partridge. *Here, There and Everywhere: Essays Upon Language* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950) 97-98. Subsequently cited as Partridge. *Here, There and Everywhere*.

³ M. Gotti. *The Language of Thieves and Vagabonds: 17th and 18th Century Canting Lexicography in England* (Lexicographica Series Maior 94. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999) 16.

⁴ Ulla Bondeson. 'Argot Knowledge as an Indicator of Criminal Socialization.' *Scandinavian Studies in Criminology* 2 (1968) 73.

The earliest records of British cant date from the 1530s. Beggars and vagabonds had existed before the sixteenth century, but in this period they became particularly numerous and dangerous and, consequently, more prominent in the public consciousness.⁵ There are several socio-historic reasons for their increase. During the 1500s there was a rise in unemployment amongst tenant farmers, due to the implementation of farm enclosures and the popularity of sheep farming, as less labour was needed for wool than for tillage. An influx of silver arriving from the New World debased the English coinage introduced by Henry VIII and Edward VI, forcing a general rise in prices, and as a consequence, the poor could not afford to buy supplies and were reduced to begging or stealing. This rampant poverty lowered the standard of living, making people more susceptible to epidemics. Numerous family breadwinners died as a result of illness, leaving widows and orphans with no adequate income. Many of the survivors of these epidemics were physically incapacitated and unable to work. The discharging of soldiers from the army also played a part in the expansion of the underworld class, as many of the soldiers who did not readjust to mainstream society survived by roaming from place to place, indulging in petty crime. During this period there was a substantial increase in England's population, reflected in the number of people born into the emerging underworld class. Added to these factors was the arrival of Gypsies in England with their nomadic way of life and their tendency to turn to crime to support themselves. Finally, the dissolution of monasteries during the Reformation (1517 – c.1555) had two major outcomes. Firstly, these monasteries previously had provided charity for the poor, who were now reduced to begging for alms, or stealing. Secondly, the monks themselves were also deprived of an income and a place to live, and many joined with bands of robbers and highwaymen that were common in the country at the time, as did many priests who had lost their livings as a result of the new laws.⁶

This latter outcome had significant consequences not only for the expansion of the underworld/criminal class, but for the nature of the language that they spoke. Partridge notes that American and Dominion cants have always generally been uncultured, and the same is largely true of British cant from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Initially, the most important influence upon British cant had been

⁵ Gotti, 5.

⁶ *ibid.*, 7-12.

the language of the Gypsies; however, in the sixteenth century British cant contained many learned words which derived from Latin – so much so, that cant was once known as ‘Thieves’ Latin.’⁷ The source was the monks and priests who joined these criminal groups and taught them Latin, the language with which they were most familiar, so that the group could communicate without being understood by the ordinary public. There have always been educated elements in British cant, taken not only from Latin, but Greek, French, Italian, Dutch and German, and allusions to art and literature, though, since about 1620 or 1630 the learned element has been small.⁸

The first acknowledged record of British cant occurs in Robert Copland’s ballad, *The hyeway to the Spyttell Hous*,⁹ which is thought to have been written in about 1536, although some sources date its publication as early as 1517.¹⁰ This work takes the form of a dialogue between Copland and the Porter of a London hospital (possibly St. Bartholomew’s Hospital);¹¹ the Porter describes the people who come and go, including various beggars, vagabonds and knaves, most of whom pretend illness or injury to take advantage of the hospital care. This early canting literature presents the underworld of the time as a criminal class separated from the rest of English society, not just by their behaviour, but through their secret canting language. To illustrate this point, the Porter quotes a short passage of cant, and refers to it as ‘babbling Frenche,’¹² identifying it as a stylistically marked variety, different from mainstream English¹³ spoken by ‘normal’ people, and difficult for others to understand. The passage is not translated into English, but is the earliest record of a sustained quotation in this language. This is also the first citation of cant as likened to ‘French;’ in the later sixteenth century cant was also known as ‘Pedlar’s French’ due to its incomprehensibility.

⁷ In his work, *Lanthorne and Candle-Light* (1608), Thomas Dekker describes several Latinate cant terms, such as: *togeman* = ‘cloak’ (from ‘toga’); *pannam* = ‘bread’ (from ‘panis’); and *cassan* = ‘cheese’ (from ‘caseus’).

⁸ Partridge. *Here, There and Everywhere*, 100.

⁹ A variety of spellings exist for this work, including *Hye Waye to the Spittel House*.

¹⁰ Judges (1965) suggests the date 1535-6 because of the text’s attacks on popery and its reference to a 1531 statute concerning beggars.

¹¹ Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 143.

¹² R. Copland. *The hyeway to the Spyttell Hous*. London (Flete Strete at the Rose Garland): c.1536. (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1982).

¹³ I have chosen the term ‘mainstream English’ to refer to the amalgam of unmarked varieties of English that are not classed as cant/criminal argot.

Another early work is John Awdeley's¹⁴ *Fraternite of Vacabondes* published in 1561, which includes a categorisation of various types of vagabonds.¹⁵ The first part of the work is concerned with the attributes and activities of both country and town members of the underworld, and begins with short descriptions of 19 types of country rogues. The cant label for each rogue is entered, followed by a full definition, thus providing the first basic glossary of the cant vocabulary. The entries are not arranged alphabetically. This list is followed by three short texts about the activities of town members of the underworld, entitled, 'The Company of Cousoners and Shifters,' describing respectively 'A Curtesy Man,' 'A Cheatour or Fingerer' and 'A Ring Faller.'¹⁶ The second part of *Fraternite of Vacabondes* lists 'The Twenty-Five Orders of Knaves.' Interestingly, although the several canting terms contained in the first part of *Fraternite of Vacabondes* have been borrowed by subsequent writers and cant lexicographers, some terms listed in the second part are not found in later publications on the underworld.

Perhaps the most significant work of the sixteenth century is Thomas Harman's *A Caveat for Common Cursetors, Vulgarly Called Vagabones*, of 1567. Although Harman was not the first slang compiler, he is the foremost of his period, acknowledged to a large extent as being the first main slang lexicographer.¹⁷ Harman was a country magistrate who lived in Kent, and had numerous opportunities to meet vagabonds, as many of them knocked on his door for charity. Harman was therefore able to collect first-hand information about the vagabonds' lives and language, and much subsequent underworld literature relies upon him for terms and details.¹⁸ His *Caveat* was designed as a handbook for magistrates and includes a record of different kinds of thieves and vagabonds, as well as an unalphabetised list of cant (which he also calls 'pelting speech')¹⁹ related to parts of the body, clothes, personal objects, objects of the house, food and drink, money and valuable objects, animals, people and places. We may extrapolate that cant vocabulary during this time cannot have been

¹⁴ Awdeley's surname was also spelt Awdelay; Jonathon Green notes that John Awdeley was also known as John Sampson and, at times, Sampson Awdeley.

¹⁵ Gotti, 19.

¹⁶ J. Awdeley. *Fraternite of Vacabondes* (1561). (Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1973) 6-10.

¹⁷ J. Green. *Slang Down the Ages: The Historical Development of Slang* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1993) v-vi. See, in addition to Green, E. Partridge and G. Noyes.

¹⁸ Gotti, 22.

¹⁹ 'Pelting speech' is derived from the term, 'paltry.' Halliday, 164.

extensive, because although Harman was very interested in cant and widely acquainted with rogues, he lists only 114 terms, defined mostly by a single synonym. Gotti notes that Harman lists some terms also listed by Awdeley, but in a slightly different form; for example, *Kitchin Co* = an (idle) boy, and *Kitchin Mortes* = a girl, are listed as *Kynchin Co* and *Kynchin Morte*. Harman also includes a cant dialogue between an *Upright Man* (a law-abiding citizen) and a Rogue, complete with a line-by-line translation. This translation is interesting, not only because it enables the reader to understand the dialogue (which Copland's passage does not), but because it clearly demonstrates the syntactical structure of cant as being identical to that of mainstream English of the period. *A Caveat* is an extremely noteworthy work, important in the historical development of canting lexicography. Because it was the first work to carry a formal glossary of cant terms that allowed a broad view of the everyday lives of members of the underworld, it is considered by many to be the earliest, though remote, precursor of the cant dictionary.²⁰

In the late sixteenth century, companies of robbers and vagabonds flourished side by side and picked up each others' language.²¹ The cant vocabulary expanded to incorporate these new lexical items. Robert Greene recorded the new influences operating upon cant of this period in his series of *Conny-Catching* pamphlets, published in the early 1590s. *Conny* (also spelt *cony*, *conie* or *coney*) was the cant term for a 'silly victim of London rogues,'²² and thus a *conny-catcher* was a rogue who outwitted or took advantage of such a person, although this term was also applied more specifically to a (card) swindler. Greene issued six pamphlets over a two-year period, the first being *A Notable Discouery of Coosnage* (1591). This pamphlet describes the techniques used by conny-catchers, showing the 'eight lawes [tricks] of villanie, leading the high waie to infamie'²³ and explaining the particular terms used in connection with each law, except the 'cheating law' about which he deliberately tells us nothing. The pamphlet also includes a glossary entitled, 'A table of the words of art, vsed in affecting these base villanies.' A second edition of *A Notable Discouery*

²⁰ G. Noyes. 'The Development of Cant Lexicography in England, 1566 – 1785.' *The English Dictionary from Cawdrey to Johnson 1604 – 1755*. Starnes and Noyes ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1946) 214.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² F. W. Chandler. *The Literature of Roguery* (1907). (New York: Lennox Hill/Burt Franklin Reprints, 1974) 95.

²³ R. Greene. *A Notable Discouery of Coosnage* (London: John Wolfe for T.N., 1591).

was issued the following year. A *Notable Discouery* provided inspiration for two subsequent pamphlets, the *Second Part of Conny-Catching* (1591) and the *Third and Last Part of Conny-Catching* (1592). Greene writes that he produced the extra pamphlets due to the public's positive response to his *Notable Discouery*; however, this is an unlikely claim, as the second pamphlet was published too soon after A *Notable Discouery* for Greene to have received any substantial feedback.

Greene's *The Black Bookes Messenger, laying open the Life and Death of Ned Browne* (1592), opens with eleven 'words of Art lately deuised by Ned Browne and his associates,'²⁴ none of which overlaps with terms in Harman's glossary. This pamphlet includes expressions referring to dishonest people, mostly various types of thieves and swindlers; lists terms for common tricks and other illegal practices; and records miscellaneous canting nouns. Also issued in 1592 was *A Dispvatation Between a Hee Conny-Catcher and a Shee Conny-Catcher*, which took the form of a dispute regarding the characters' comparative merits in sexes and professions.

The final pamphlet, entitled *Groundworke of Conny-Catching*, is perhaps the least useful of the series. Also published in 1592, the pamphlet was attributed to Greene, but his authorship is uncertain, as the work displays none of Greene's ingenuity and is almost direct plagiarism of Harman's glossary of 25 years previously, despite the omission of Harman's list of vagabonds and their speech, and the substitution of three new rogue anecdotes. Although all six of Greene's pamphlets are of varying quality, originality and lexical interest, the glossaries reflect the growing interest in the secret language of the professionally dishonest and, in their entirety, the pamphlets offer much material on the methods of underworld characters.

Gertrude Noyes writes that, '[I]n cant lexicography, even more than in early English lexicography generally, progress has to be measured in terms of constant borrowing.'²⁵ Many of the works discussed in this review are derived from and draw upon earlier works. Such a work is Thomas Dekker's (also spelt Decker) *Belman of London*, published in 1608, where the author describes the underworld and discusses 17 different male and female members of that community. The work includes many

²⁴ Noyes, 215.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 213.

cant terms taken from Greene's *Black Bookes* pamphlet, although sometimes different names are given for certain terms. In addition, the section of the conclusion labelled, 'Short Discourse of Canting,' turns out to be the dialogue between the Upright Man and the Rogue from Harman's *Caveat*.

Dekker published a further work in 1608, *Lanthorne and Candle-light*, which is also derived from Harman's work of 1567 and from Greene's pamphlets. The first chapter of Dekker's work, 'Of Canting,' comprises a description and history of canting, the majority of which is taken from Harman. A glossary of cant terms is also included. Although Dekker actually deals with all of Harman's 114 terms in the complete work, the glossary itself contains only 88 words, because Dekker omits any word already explained in the main text. One lexicographical advance is arrangement by alphabetical order rather than by subject category, a convention that remains the same in later editions of this work. It is curious that Harman's glossary, more than 40 years old by the time *Lanthorne and Candle-Light* appeared, was not modified until this point; the fact that the glossary remained unchanged through the years indicates its popularity with the reading public.²⁶ This stasis may also have been aided by the fact that the glossary was not treated with any lexicographical development in mind. Greene and Dekker were writers, not lexicographers, and were therefore probably more interested in the fictional possibilities of their material, rather than in any conscious development of a cant dictionary.

However, despite the fact that so much of Dekker's work is taken from existing sources, he still provides previously unrecorded data. Dekker prints a list of rogue types taken from *A Caveat*, but introduces new materials, and new names for roguish figures, the items they used and the criminal activities in which they were involved.²⁷ He also points out the frequent recourse to the process of compounding in order to create new cant terms, for example: *Smelling Chete* = nose; *Prat-ling Chete* = mouth; *Crashing-Chetes* = teeth; *Fambling-Chete* = ring (from *Fambles* = hands); *Muffling chete* = napkin; *Belly-chete* = apron; *Grunting-chete* = pig; *Cackling-chete* = cock;

²⁶ *ibid.*, 216.

²⁷ Gotti, 27.

and *quacking-chete* = calf, sheep.²⁸ Dekker's work makes a useful contribution to the development of canting lexicography by its inclusion of new information and terminology, and its enlivening and improvement of old material. Dekker's book proved to be extremely popular and an eighth edition, under the title of *English Villanies*, was published in 1648.

In 1610, a man known only as S.R.²⁹ published a work in answer to Dekker's, entitled, *Martin Mark-All, Beadle of Bridewell; His Defence and Answer to the Belman of London*. The plot covers a trial carried out by members of the underworld against the Bellman of London, whose crime was to have made public the most common expressions of the criminals' secret language.³⁰

In *Martin Mark-All*, S.R. exposes Dekker's plagiarism from Harman and asserts his own superior experience of the underworld. He further modifies Dekker's work by reprinting Dekker's glossary and writing in additions and corrections. In particular, he draws attention to Dekker's out of date items, and provides new senses for some previously recorded terms; for example, he notes that '*Bung* is now used for a pocket, heretofore for a purse.'³¹ S.R. uses special symbols to indicate these modifications to Dekker's list. He writes of the Belman (thus of Dekker):

I have thought good not only to shew his error in some places in setting downe olde wordes bred fortie yeeres agoe before he was borne; for wordes that are bred in these dayes ... But have enlarged his Dictionary (or Master Harmans) with such wordes as I thinke hee never heard of (and yet in use too) but not out of vaine glorie, as his ambition is, but indeede as an experienced souldier that hath deerely paid for it ... You shall know the wordes not set in eyther his Dictionaries by this marke §: and for shewing the error in his words, and true englishing of the same and other, this marke ¶ shall serve.³²

In the end, the glossary contains 129 words, 10 of which are modernisations, and 53 are additions, incorporating local London expressions, compounds and distasteful

²⁸ T. Dekker. *Lanthorne and Candle-Light, or, The Bell-Mans Second Nights Walke: In Which Hee Brings to Light, a Broode of More Strange Villanies, Then Euer Were Till This Yeare Disouered* (1608). (The English Experience Series Number 585. New York: Da Capo Press, and Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973.) This reproduction of the early text contains no page numbers.

²⁹ It is not clear to whom S.R. refers; however, Samuel Rowlands and Samuel Rid are the prime candidates. Jonathon Green favours the former, but other twentieth century critics such as Noyes, Aydelotte and Judges, have tended to favour the latter, as Rid later published a small book, *The Art of Juggling*, which seems to continue the discussion of gipsy life started in *Martin Mark-All*.

³⁰ Gotti, 30.

³¹ S.R. *Martin Mark-All, Beadle of Bridewell; His Defence and Answer to the Belman of London* (London: Printed for John Budge and Richard Bonian, 1610).

³² *ibid.*

expressions.³³ It is interesting to note that some of these annotations make their way into later editions of Dekker's own work.³⁴ S.R. makes a relevant contribution to canting lexicography through the inclusion of many terms that had never before been recorded, and through the information he provides about their range of use and their evolution during the period from the mid-sixteenth century.

In 1612 there appeared *O per se O, or a new Cryer of Lanthorne and Candle-Light, an Addition of the Bellman's Second Night's Walke*. Although attributed to Dekker, the text was published anonymously, and may well have been the work of a hack-writing contemporary. *O per se O* was obviously designed as a sequel to *Lanthorne and Candle-Light* as the first part of the text consists merely of a reprint of the 1608 work, while the second part represents its continuation.³⁵ Of especial interest here is the insertion of one verse of a canting song: a song containing, or composed completely of, cant, sung by various members of the underworld. The song found here appears in almost all of the subsequent cant dictionaries, although other songs are also listed in later publications.³⁶

Overview 1530 – 1612

In the period 1530 – 1612 we witness the first records of British cant language and the earliest attempts at cant glossaries. Several trends are apparent. None of these works was solely devoted to cant, but provided either brief lists of cant appended to a larger text and/or a small number of terms embedded within the body of a larger text. Possibly this is due to the fact (as appears from such records) that cant vocabulary was not particularly extensive at this time. The cant terms that appear in early texts such as Copland (c.1536) and Awdeley (1561) are largely concerned with the names of beggars and vagabonds; however, later works expand these narrow parameters to

³³ Noyes, 217.

³⁴ J. Coleman. 'Strange Linguists: The Cant and Slang Dictionary Tradition.' *Lexicology, Semantics and Lexicography*. Julie Coleman and Christian J. Kay ed. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000) 77.

³⁵ A. V. Judges. *The Elizabethan Underworld*. (Second Edition.) (New York: Octagon Books, 1965) 512.

³⁶ J. C. Hotten. *The Slang Dictionary: Etymological, Historical and Anecdotal* (1887 ed.). (East Ardsley: EP Publishing, 1972) 375. Subsequently cited as Hotten, *The Slang Dictionary*.

describe an array of everyday objects, as in Harman (1567), or a wider variety of criminals, as in Greene (1591-2) and Dekker (1608a, 1608b). Cant terms for underworld women appear only sparingly; most terms describe beggars and women of varying age and morality. Cant glossaries of this early period were simple, with terms usually defined by a single synonym. In addition to these brief glossaries, works of this early period included short conversations in cant (initially untranslated, as in Copland); canting songs, as in Dekker (1612); and information about the common practices and specific tricks of members of the underworld, as seen in Awdeley, Greene and Dekker. Most of the authors of this period felt the need to justify their inclusion of cant glossaries and associated material, and many wrote that such information was included for the purpose of social reform. Awdeley and Harman, at least, were sincere in their attempts – Harman even sent a list of local rogues and their places of residence to the authorities so that they could be apprehended.³⁷ Greene and Dekker also wrote under this claim, but were more motivated by the fictional possibilities of their hugely popular material, and neither spared any salacious detail in his role as supposed reformer.

The influence of other genres upon cant lexicography is apparent from the late sixteenth century onwards. Greene's and Dekker's publications fall into the category of 'rogue fiction,' which details the adventures and crimes of one or several rogues. Rogue fiction was usually sensationalist and deliberately shocking, and included cant terminology to add authenticity to the narrative. Because of this, previously unrecorded terms were introduced to cant lexicographers. In return, authors of rogue fiction also drew upon existing cant glossaries for their material.

Even in this early period, the unacknowledged borrowing that characterises the entire tradition of canting lexicography (and other types of lexicography) is strongly evident, Harman being the chief source at this time. Although much of this plagiarism did not add significantly to the advancement of cant lexicography, some authors' attempts to improve upon or outdo their predecessors meant that new terms were recorded and lexicographical conventions were developed. By the early seventeenth century, a significant number of cant terms and expressions had been recorded. Much of this

³⁷ Noyes, 217-218.

documented cant had been examined in detail; as well as recording terms and definitions, later writers of this period, such as Dekker (1608b) and S.R. (1610), remarked upon the metalinguistic elements of cant, such as origin, processes of word-formation, range of use and semantic evolution.³⁸ As the tradition of cant lexicography developed, cant ceased to be simply of interest to members of the underworld or law enforcement authorities, and became familiar to a wider readership. The work of the sixteenth century, in particular that of Copland, Awdeley and Harman, caused many cant terms to be incorporated into fashionable slang, a fashion that lasted until the Civil War.

Records of British Canting Language 1612 – 1790

The works discussed in this section are Richard Head's *The English Rogue* (1665) and *The Canting Academy* (1673); Elisha Coles' *An English Dictionary* (1676); Shirley's *The Triumph of Wit* (1688); N.H.'s (possibly John Dunton's) *The Ladies Dictionary* (1694); B.E.'s *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (c.1698); Tuus Inimicus' *Hell Upon Earth* (1703); Alexander Smith's *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, House-Breakers, Shop-Lifts and Cheats Of both Sexes* (1714); *Bacchus and Venus* (1738); John Poulter's *The Discoveries of John Poulter, Alias Baxter* (1754); Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785); and George Parker's *Life's Painter of Variegated Characters in Public and Private Life* (1789).

From about 1610, for the next fifty years, rogue and canting literature lapsed, and the advance towards a canting dictionary was halted. Some dramatists, such as Jonson and Dekker, still made use of rogue themes or cant in their plays, but writers mainly turned to other subjects, and the market was taken up largely by foreign picaresque novels in translation. Important reasons for this lapse were the upheaval of the Civil War and the moral strictures of the Puritan Interregnum, which discouraged the output of rogue books in England.³⁹

³⁸ Gotti, 32.

³⁹ Noyes, 218.

Another important reason for the break in continuity of rogue literature and the canting tradition was because up until about 1610 the reason why most writers had included cant documentaries had been for a (professed) reforming purpose. Noyes writes that: 'After the Restoration beggars were no longer a contemporary problem, and there was no excuse for discussing them on the ground of reform. Rogue literature temporarily lost ground.'⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the subject of cant was still attractive to both writers and the public, and it was during the second half of the seventeenth century that interest again emerged in underworld language varieties.

The first author to embrace this renewed interest in rogue and canting literature was Richard Head, who published his book, *The English Rogue: Described, in the Life of Meriton Latroon, A Witty Extravagant. Being a Compleat History of the Most Eminent Cheats of Both Sexes* (also known as *The Life and Death of the English Rogue*), in 1665. *The English Rogue* is derived from Dekker's work of 1608 (and hence from Harman's) and contains a canting vocabulary based on the 'discoveries' of the protagonist, Meriton Latroon (from *latron* = robber)⁴¹ who, in Chapter Five of Part One, joins the 'Ragged Regiment' and learns their ways, their songs and their language. He writes of cant: 'It is a confused invention of words; for its dialect I cannot find to be grounded on any certain rules; and no wonder since the founders and practicers thereof are the chief fathers and nourishers of disorder.'⁴² Head's glossary contains 187 words, covering a rich variety of subjects related to the underworld; however, his definitions are very simple and brief. Similarly to previous writers, Head states that he has not included all the cant that he knows, only the terms and expressions commonly in use. In addition to the glossary, Head also offers a description and a condensed version of the history of cant. *The English Rogue* is an important work in the development of canting lexicography; because Head was the first writer to deal with rogue themes and cant after such a period of time, he is identified as favouring a revival of interest in the British underworld.⁴³

Head's success with his 1665 publication motivated him to produce another similar work in 1673. *The Canting Academy, or, the Devils Cabinet Opened* (also known as

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ J. Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 152.

⁴² R. Head. *The English Rogue* (1665). (Boston: New Frontiers Press, 1961) 29.

⁴³ For example, see Gotti (1999).

The Canting Academy; or, Villanies Discovered) is derived from *The English Rogue*, but is of greater interest and significance than this previous work. *The Canting Academy* examines the lives and manners of the members of the underworld, and records their most popular words. Head is careful to avoid censure by constructing his subjects as disreputable so as to consciously distance them from his 'respectable' readership, a tactic adopted by later lexicographers of cant. As he writes:

Courteous Reader: You are not ignorant of how little there is extant in Print of a way of speaking, commonly known by the name of Canting, a Speech as confused, as the Professors thereof are disorderly dispos'd; and yet you know how much it is in use among some Persons, I mean, the more debauched and looser sort of people.⁴⁴

Head stresses the fact that he has gone to a lot of trouble in preparing his cant glossary, emphasising the reliability of his data; indeed, he is the first author since Harman to have done so. Head is also the first author since Harman to discuss seriously his sources and methodological approach, and to take into account the changing nature of cant. As part of this discussion Head provides a paragraph where he describes gathering information from inmates in Newgate prison and remarks that the inmates (members of the general underworld community) frequently had to alter their words before they became too widely known.

Significantly, the glossary itself displays advancements in canting lexicography by providing definitions which are less concise and impersonal, and by using a double word list, which not only translates cant into English, but English into cant. Each section, entitled respectively, 'Canting before the English' and 'English before the Canting,' comprises around 250-300 expressions, making the glossary the most comprehensive list to date, given that a total of only 500 different cant expressions were included in all the books on cant published between 1535 and 1612. Of those terms in Head's glossary, 153 are new, or list a meaning different from that given in other publications.⁴⁵ It is worth noting, however, that not all of the terms in the first section appear in the corresponding section, so that some terms listed in 'Canting Before the English' are not listed in 'English Before the Canting.' No acknowledgement is made of this, nor is any reason given for the lack of consistency.

⁴⁴ R Head. *The Canting Academy, or, the Devils Cabinet Opened* (London: Printed by F. Leach for Mat. Drew, 1673) i.

⁴⁵ Gotti, 35.

The Canting Academy concludes with descriptions of certain types of villains. This section is also of lexical interest, as these descriptions amount to elongated definitions. *The Canting Academy* is significant in the development of canting lexicography as it involves a more accurate treatment of linguistic aspects of the canting world, not only through the inclusion of a comprehensive glossary, but through a commentary upon the features of cant: for example, the fact that the people who use cant consider it to be a secret language and take pains to preserve its secrecy, and that cant is ever-changing to adapt to internal pressures within, and external pressures upon, the underworld community.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although specialised cant glossaries were numerous and popular and had a marked influence on the tastes of the reading public, they displayed a slow advance in lexicographical technique. Early pioneer 'mainstream' lexicographers such as Robert Cawdrey (*A Table Alphabeticall*, 1604), John Bullokar (*An English Expositour, or Compleat Dictionary*, 1616) and Henry Cockeram (*English Dictionarie*, 1623), had developed more sophisticated lexicographical conventions that had not been adopted by authors of cant lexicons. Likewise, however, none of the mainstream lexicographers acknowledged any cant material. Although they revised and expanded their works throughout their careers, none of them showed any interest in this language of rogues and vagabonds, although it had been very popular in literature during the Elizabethan period.⁴⁶ This is why Elisha Coles' *An English Dictionary* of 1676 is significant in this context, as it was the first mainstream lexicographical work to include any considerable body of cant. Coles justifies the inclusion of cant by writing that: "'Tis no Disparagement to understand the Canting Terms. It may chance to save your throat from being cut, or (at least) your Pocket from being pickt.'⁴⁷ The cant terms are not listed separately, but are in alphabetical order with the other entries, identified by the abbreviation *c* between entry and gloss. The word *canting* is actually included as an entry, defined as 'the Language of Rogues and Beggars.' Coles includes 231 entries, about the same number as listed in previous canting dictionaries and glossaries. He draws mainly upon Head's work of 1673, probably as the most convenient source; all but one of Coles' entries are found in *The Canting Academy*, although Coles reduces the number

⁴⁶ Noyes, 212.

⁴⁷ E. Coles. *An English Dictionary* (1676). (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1971) 'To the Reader' iv.

of entries by combining under a single headword some terms listed separately by Head. Coles' definitions are brief, sometimes taken verbatim from Head or made shorter, obviously to save space in the larger dictionary. He also makes some spelling corrections to Head's terms; for example, *Rarling Cove* = a coachman, becomes *Ratling-Cove*. Although the work does not include any new cant terms discovered by Coles and does not constitute any substantial contribution to the cant corpus, the importance of *An English Dictionary* lies in the compiler's decision to include underworld language in a publication not exclusively devoted to such a variety.

Apart from the author of *The Ladies Dictionary*, Coles' decision to include cant terminology was not followed up by any subsequent mainstream lexicographer until Nathan Bailey published his *Universal Etymological English Dictionary* in 1721; however, the *English Dictionary* of 1704 issued by Edward Cocker and John Hawkins was almost completely borrowed from Coles, with very little new material incorporated. The one notable change was the copyist's decision to delete all the cant terms, which met with widespread disapproval from the public, and in the second edition of 1715, about 75 of the cant terms were grudgingly reinstated.⁴⁸

Following its initial publication in 1688, Shirley's miscellany *The Triumph of Wit, or ingenuity display'd in its perfection* went through many editions and imitations and was a populariser of cant terms. The glossary of cant, entitled 'The Mystery and Art of Wheedling and Canting,' is an incidental feature and appears in Part Three of the miscellany, prefaced with the usual claim that the information contained is for reformative and deterrent purposes only. Shirley incorporates a passage on the origins of cant and a vocabulary comprising about 200 terms and 30 longer expressions, clearly derived from Head's work of 1673. Possibly Shirley acknowledges this borrowing from Head, because he calls the work 'The Newest and Most Useful Academy.'⁴⁹

One work to draw inspiration both from Head's *Canting Academy* and Coles' *English Dictionary* was *The Ladies Dictionary; Being a General Entertainment For the Fair-Sex*, which appeared in 1694. The authorship of this work is uncertain: some have

⁴⁸ Noyes, 212.

⁴⁹ Noyes, 223.

attributed it to one John Dunton, for whom the work was printed; others to N.H., who signed the Dedication. *The Ladies Dictionary* is largely a mainstream work, designed to incorporate a wide variety of lexical items and encyclopaedic information, but it also includes a considerable amount of canting terminology. This work is important because it is the first main dictionary or encyclopaedic work designed especially for a female reading public, and the inclusion of canting terminology indicates cant's widespread vogue and its relevance for yet another section of British society.

As well as terms and definitions, *The Ladies Dictionary* contains anecdotes, biographies, historical accounts, short poems and letters. The author also includes comprehensive etymologies for various entries, although not, significantly, for cant terminology; indeed, the cant elements do not even appear to be labelled as such. Because the author's aim is to offer 'a Compleat Directory to the Female-Sex in all Relations, Companies, and States of Life,' most of the cant terms here are treated briefly and, in general, describe only different classes of female beggars.⁵⁰ Once more, a passage is inserted whereby the author attempts (in an earnest and loquacious fashion) to justify his inclusion of canting terminology. N.H. writes that he incorporates cant and information about underworld women because he wants to draw his readers' attention to the frailties of their sex; rather than discrediting his readers, however, he argues that this component will serve to highlight their virtues:

But never does my Hand more compulsively direct my Pen, nor my Pen with less willingness blot Paper, then when I am forced, in this work, to lay open the frailties of your Sex, before so much commended. But this is my Encouragement to proceed; because I can produce nothing out of History, to the Disgrace of the bad and vicious, which adds not to the Honour of the good and vertuous. Were none foul, what benefit were it to be fair? And if more deformed, what Grace could it be to be well featured? There were no honour to be ascribed to Modesty, but that we see the dishonour of Immodesty depending; nor to the temperate, but that we daily find the Inconveniencies inherent to Riot and Excess. Besides, were all alike fair, what praise were it to be beautiful? Or if all alike chaste, what admiration could be attributed to so rare a vertue?⁵¹

The length to which N.H. goes to defend his canting terminology reveals that the language of the underworld was still, to many people, an unsavoury subject; however, N.H. raises the profile of cant by including it at all in such a dictionary, marking a valuable development in the tradition of cant lexicography.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 220.

⁵¹ N.H. *The Ladies Dictionary; Being a General Entertainment For the Fair-Sex* (London: Printed for John Dunton at the Raven in the Poultry, 1694) Dedication v-vi.

The wide interest in ‘roguish literature’ in the second half of the seventeenth century, along with publications such as *An English Dictionary* and *The Ladies Dictionary*, encouraged a more informed perception of members of the underworld and an acceptance of their jargon as a variety of English language. One dictionary to treat the language of the underworld in a scholarly manner, as the language of a subculture and a distinctive variety of English, is *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* by a man known only as ‘B.E., Gent.’ The exact date of the text is unknown, and has been variously assigned between 1690 and 1700, although the general consensus is that it was published about 1698,⁵² as *The Ladies Dictionary* of 1694 relied strongly upon Head, not upon B.E.’s more comprehensive source. B.E.’s work is perhaps the most significant discussed so far, as it is the first full-length canting dictionary, devoted solely to an alphabetised cant glossary. B.E. was a pioneer in the development of canting lexicography because of his important contribution to the collection and definition of canting vocabulary, and his inclusion of other terms from the lower echelons of London society, creating a detailed picture of contemporary ‘low’ speech. Maurizio Gotti writes of B.E.’s innovative methodological approach, that:

In his search for new material [B.E.] has collected not only canting terms, but also expressions derived from other registers of the English language being used at this time by members of the lower strata of British society. These other lexical elements include colloquialisms and informal phrases, specialised terms and regional expressions. In doing so, B.E. has therefore behaved like a modern sociolinguist, identifying a specific area (London) and a specific group of language users (the members of the underworld), noting down all the words and expressions that he has come across in that field with the meanings they have in that context, and integrating them – at least as regards canting elements – with the terms that have been included in various glossaries and other publications. In this way B.E. has presented the language of a ‘subculture’.⁵³

Despite his innovations, B.E.’s definition of *cant* is relatively conservative, in line with the traditional interpretation of the term: ‘*Canting* c. the Cypher or Mysterious Language, of Rogues, Gypsies, Beggars, Thieves, &c.’⁵⁴ (Note that, as with Coles, canting terms are labelled with c. between entry and gloss.) Some of B.E.’s definitions echo Head’s *Canting Academy*, but B.E.’s work is so much more comprehensive that the charge of plagiarism can be only minor. B.E. deals with a far greater number of words and, in general, his definitions are longer, livelier, more

⁵² See for example: Partridge (1937), Green (1996), Gotti (1999).

⁵³ Gotti, 66.

⁵⁴ B.E., Gent. *A New Dictionary of the Terms Ancient and Modern of the Canting Crew* (London: Printed for W. Hawes, P. Gilbourn and W. Davis, 1698?). Note: this very early edition of B.E.’s dictionary contains no page numbers.

readable and more interesting, allowing a true insight into the culture of the late seventeenth century underworld. He also gives related expressions or usage examples embedded within the headword entry, for example, in the case of the following entry for *Bone* (verb):

Bone, c. to Apprehend, Seize, Take or Arrest. *I'll Bone ye*, c. I'll cause you to be Arrested. *We shall be Bon'd*, c. we shall be Apprehended for the Robbery. *The Cove is Bon'd and gon to the Whit*, c. the Rogue is taken up and carried to Newgate, or any other Gaol. *The Cull has Bon'd the Fen* (for *Fence*) or *Bloss that bit the Blow*, c. the Man has Taken the Thief that Robb'd his House, Shop, or Pickt his Pocket. *He has Bit his Blow*, but if he be *Bon'd*, he must shove the *Tumbler*, c. he has Stole the Goods, or done the Feat, but if he be Taken, he'll be Whipt at the Cart-tail. *I have Bon'd her Dudds Fagg'd*, and *Brush'd*, c. I have took away my Mistress Cloathes, Beat her, and am troop'd off. *Boning the Fence*, c. finding the Goods where Conceal'd and Seizing.⁵⁵

One point worth mentioning is that although B.E. provides many examples of how a word may be used in a sentence, he very rarely mentions the word's range of use. In any case, however, when it appeared, *A New Dictionary of the Canting Crew* was the most complete and well-researched cant publication to date. A further edition of B.E.'s dictionary followed in 1710, and the work continued to have a profound influence upon subsequent works until the late eighteenth century.

The interest in rogue and canting literature remained strong throughout the eighteenth century. One of the earliest publications of the century was *Hell Upon Earth; or the Most Pleasant and Delectable History of Whittington's Colledge, Otherwise (Vulgarly) Called Newgate*, published in 1703. The author's identity is unknown, as he uses the pseudonym, Tuus Inimicus (Your Enemy). This is a very interesting work which, surprisingly, does not feature in the main discussions of the history and development of cant lexicography in Britain. Although it is only a short 12-page pamphlet, its significance lies in that it involves a study of an actual prison (Newgate, in London) rather than a free underworld community, and describes the various rogues and vagabonds as inmates confined within an institution. The author provides new cant terms for the environmental features of the prison and the people and procedures within that prison, which adds new material to this discussion. *Hell Upon Earth* is very lively and highly entertaining, and the author frequently indulges in grotesque descriptions of the terrible prison conditions and the suffering of the inmates.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, no page reference. With this and successive quotations, the words marked in italics are as they appear in the original texts.

Again, the purpose of the pamphlet is proposed as precautionary: 'Being very useful to all Persons, either Gentle or Simple, in shewing them the Manner of the Robberies and Cheats committed by Villains on the Nation; whereby they may be the more careful of being wrong'd by them for the Future.'⁵⁶ The title itself contains cant, in 'Whittington's Colledge' for Newgate Prison (also recorded in B.E. in shortened form 'Whit c. Newgate'). The first part of the pamphlet contains descriptions of the types of people incarcerated in the prison. The author discusses female and male inmates respectively, giving cant names for these various types of rogues and for the crimes for which they are commonly imprisoned, as in these passages typical of the general text:

Some of the Female Sex come hither [to Newgate] for the *Buttock and Twang*; that's, going upon the Lay of being pick'd up, and when the *Cully* is groping *Jilt* in a Dark Ally with his Breeches down, she picks his Pockets, and then crys out her (pretended) Husband is coming, who stands lurking hard by, and rescues the Strumpet, with *God damn you Sir, What have you to do with my Wife?* Whose frightful Oaths and drawn Sword, make the deluded *Loggerhead* run away, with the loss of his Money, to save his Life.⁵⁷

As for the Male Students which come here, ... Some are very expert at the *Sneak*; which is, sneaking into houses by Night or Day, and pike off with that which is none of their own. Some are very acute for the *Running-Smobble*; which is a Lay Two or Three have together, one of 'em running into a Shop, when People are in a Back-Room, or busie behind a Counter, snatching up something, conveys it to one of his nimble Comrades, and trip it away as fast as a Race-Horse over *New-Market Heath*. Some are very good for the *Sneaking-Budge*; which is, privately stealing any thing off a Stall.⁵⁸

Tuus Inimicus also talks about the inmates' experiences of incarceration and describes the basic layout and main physical features of the prison, listing the inmates' names for each of these areas, for example:

[T]he *Lower ward*, where the tight slovenly Dogs lying upon ragged Blankets spread near *Sir Reverence*, one would take to be *Old Nick's* Back-Yard, where all the damn'd go to ease their roasted Arses; and trampling on the Floor, the Lice crackling under Feet, make such a noise, as walking on Shells which are strew'd over Garden-Walks. To this nasty Place is adjoyning the *Stone-Hold*, where *Convicts* lie, till a Free Pardon grants 'em Liberty from Tribulation ... This Low Dungeon is a real House of meagre Looks, and ill smells; for Lice, Drink, and Tobacco is all the Compound. When the Prisoners are disposed to recreate themselves with walking, they go up into a spacious Room call'd the *High-Hall* ... On the North-side, is a small room call'd the *Buggering Hold*; but from whence it takes its Name I cannot well tell, unless it is a Fate attending this Place, that some confin'd here, may or have been addicted to *Sodomy* ... Just by them lie the *Tangerines*, in a large room call'd *Tangier*, which next to the *Lower-ward*, is the nastiest Place in the Gaol; the miserable inhabitants hereof are *Debtors*.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Tuus Inimicus. *Hell Upon Earth; or the Most Pleasant and Delectable History of Whittington's Colledge, Otherwise (Vulgarly) Called Newgate* (London: 1703) Title Page.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 7.

The work is broken up mid-way by a cant glossary listing 104 cant terms and definitions not already mentioned in the main body of the text. In the introductory passage preceding the glossary it is clear that there are commonalities between the points raised by Inimicus and those mentioned by previous authors, for example, the idea that cant is confusing and hard to understand (Copland c.1536); that it is unsavoury (N.H. 1694), (the assumption that the author's intended audience will also find it so is implicit), and that the unsavoury and disorderly aspect of the language is indicative of the debauched character of the people who use it (Head 1665); that cant is constantly changing and developing (Head 1673); that a knowledge of cant is useful to members of mainstream society as it may one day save their lives (Coles 1676); that the terms listed do not comprise the total number of cant terms used generally or known by the author (Greene 1591-2; Head 1665); and that the author has taken great trouble in collecting his material and compiling his glossary, so as to ensure the reliability of his data (Harman 1567; Head 1673; B.E. c.1698). Inimicus writes of his subject:

It is a broken sort of Speech, but daily more and more refin'd; and for the good of Travellers and other People, who may oftentimes save their Money and Lives too, by knowing the *Cant*, I have underneath set down the most necessary Words used by dishonest persons; which I have with great Pains and Labour, as well as Charges, collected from the Knowledge of the Chief Professors of the *Canting-Tongue*, now residing in this most noted *Academy* of Sin in *London*; the several words (as in Dictionaries) being Alphabetically digested.⁶⁰

The glossary gives only basic definitions, mostly one or two words. Several of these terms are also found in B.E., although Inimicus' lexicographical technique is nowhere near as refined and his definitions are not as detailed. He does, however, modify the spelling of some of B.E.'s terms: *Rum-ville* = London, becomes *Rumvil*, and *Harmans* = stocks, appears as *Harmin*, although whether these are conscious modifications of B.E. or simply the author's independent renderings is uncertain. Significantly, many of the prison-specific terms listed here are not found in B.E.'s dictionary. Following the glossary, *Hell Upon Earth* also includes a short passage of cant, which is untranslated.

This work has been discussed here fully, and there are two reasons for its importance. Firstly, the pamphlet records so many new (prison-specific) canting terms, and

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 5.

secondly, its format, composition and author's comments so neatly demonstrate the lexicographical conventions and approaches to the study of cant that have developed over the course of 165 years of English canting lexicography.

The early eighteenth century also witnessed the rise of the rogue biography, which detailed the life, adventures and deeds of a criminal protagonist. Unlike the extant rogue fiction, the subjects of the rogue biographies were real people, although their personalities and adventures were undoubtedly embellished to the point of fantasy in many cases. Like rogue fiction, however, the rogue biography made considerable use of the language of the underworld to enhance the credibility and overall effect of the narrative, and thus introduced and popularised new canting expressions, contributing to the corpus of recorded cant. The first notable collection of rogue biographies in English is Alexander Smith's *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, House-Breakers, Shop-Lifts and Cheats Of both Sexes, in and about London, and other Places of Great-Britain, for above fifty years last past*, published in two volumes in 1714.

Smith was a writer on the lives and ways of disreputable men, and his work contains a collection of extremely entertaining short tales about various rogues, interspersed with cant terms and expressions. The tales are episodic in structure, with no overarching plot; most of the paragraphs begin with, 'One time...', 'Another time...' or 'Not long after (that)' Of the early rogue biographies, Smith's work in particular is of lexical interest as he includes a 'Thieves' New Canting Dictionary,' consisting of 206 terms with derived expressions, in his first volume. Again, like previous authors, Smith tells us that: 'Indeed we have been at no small Pains to collect the Lives of these sinful Wretches, being very punctual not only in decyphering their Canting Language, but also divulging their covert Engagements, cunning Flatteries, treacherous Compositions, and underhand Compliances, in all their illegal Enterprizes.'⁶¹ In his dictionary, Smith draws upon B.E.'s work of c.1698, often copying his definitions exactly, although other definitions are treated more briefly. B.E.'s etymological

⁶¹ A. Smith. *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, House-Breakers, Shop-Lifts and Cheats Of both Sexes, in and about London, and other Places of Great-Britain, for above fifty years last past*. (Second Edition, Volume I.) (London: Printed for J. Morphew near Stationers-Hall, and A. Dodd without Temple Bar, 1714) iii.

information is omitted entirely. Occasionally, Smith's treatment is careless, and he incorrectly reproduces parts of B.E.'s text.

The second volume, *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted⁶² Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, and other Thieves and Murderers, Of both Sexes, for above fifty years last past; Continued from Du Vall, and the German Princess, which compleats the History to the present time. Wherein their Thefts, Cheats, and Murders, committed in Great-Britain, and Ireland, are farther exposed*, carries a disclaimer, in which Smith explains that:

The First Volume of this History having met with a Kind Reception in the World, I have, at the Request of several worthy, and very honest Gentlemen, been persuaded to oblige my Country with a second volume, or Inventory of Other Mens Faults; which are not made Publick with an Intention the World should imitate them, but that the Reader should be deterr'd by them from committing the like Crimes, and make his Advantage of their Misfortunes.⁶³

Despite this profession of morality, Smith's devotion to his subject matter is obvious. It is also highly unlikely that the second volume was endorsed by any respectable gentlemen, as it is merely a continuation of the first volume published at the same time.

The two-volume publication was very popular and at least five editions were produced in quick succession. It is the fifth edition of 1719 (of which the first volume appears under the slightly different title of *A Compleat History of the Lives and Robberies of the Most Notorious Highwaymen, Footpads, Shoplifts, & Cheats of Both Sexes*) that has added lexical interest, as it offers not only the Canting Dictionary but a third volume containing 'The Thieves' Exercise,' 'The Thieves' Grammar' and 'The Thieves' Key.' While the last two sections have little lexicographical relevance, 'The Thieves' Exercise' is useful because it is a specialised glossary listing 30 terms of command with explanations, many of which had not previously been recorded. Smith's inclusion of new canting expressions and his different interpretations of existing cant terminology confer a certain degree of lexicographic novelty upon his

⁶² In some editions the word 'Notorious' appears instead.

⁶³ A. Smith. *The History of the Lives of the Most Noted (also Notorious) Highway-Men, Foot-Pads, and other Thieves and Murderers, Of both Sexes, for above fifty years last past; Continued from Du Vall, and the German Princess, which compleats the History to the present time. Wherein their Thefts, Cheats, and Murders, committed in Great-Britain, and Ireland, are farther exposed.* (Second Edition, Volume 2.) (London: Printed for J. Morphew near Stationers-Hall, and A. Dodd without Temple Bar, 1714) i-ii.

rogue biographies, demonstrating that works of this genre have been valuable in the development of cant lexicography.

Nathan Bailey's major work, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, did much to promote cant as a serious subject for scholarly study. Bailey follows Coles' example of including cant words in a dictionary not exclusively devoted to the language of the underworld. Although the dictionary was initially published in 1721, it is the third edition of 1737 that is significant, as this was the first edition to incorporate canting terminology. As in Coles, the terms are not arranged separately, but appear in alphabetical order with the other entries, and are clearly labelled as *Cant*. Bailey gives keen attention to etymology, often acknowledging the sources of his etymologies. Although Bailey was not the first mainstream lexicographer to pay attention to the language of the underworld, the popularity of his dictionary is important, as it demonstrates that cant was now being accepted readily into the British collective consciousness.

In 1725 an adaptation of B.E.'s c.1698 dictionary was published by an anonymous author. This adaptation, entitled *A New Canting Dictionary: Comprehending all the Terms, Antient and Modern, Used in the Several Tribes of Gypsies, Beggars, Shoplifters, High-waymen, Foot-Pads, and all other Clans of Cheats and Villains. Interspersed With Proverbs, Phrases, Figurative Speeches, &c.* is considered by some critics to be more valuable than its predecessor.⁶⁴ To a large extent, the 1725 dictionary is blatant plagiarism of the earlier source, but the author makes several intelligent revisions and augmentations. The preface of this dictionary is longer than B.E.'s, although the author retains B.E.'s main ideas and phrasing. In the dictionary proper, the author defines his terms in a similar way to B.E., but provides fuller explanations which are easier to understand, or more suitable to the canting context. For example, the entry for *palliard* (one of the seventh rank of the canting crew, who pretends physical injury to receive charity) is much enlarged from B.E. with about five times as much information given. The author inserts some additional terms and expressions, and makes occasional corrections to B.E.'s text. He also includes illustrative anecdotes, taken from personal knowledge or from rogue literature of the

⁶⁴ See, for example, Noyes (1946).

period, and acknowledges the mainstream senses of any words used by the general population as well as by members of the underworld. A further addition to the work is an appendix of canting songs.

The author is more discriminatory and consistent in what he excludes, for example, all non-cant terms entered in the earlier dictionary are omitted. The two works, therefore, are of approximate length, as *A New Canting Dictionary* contains fewer items than B.E.'s dictionary, but attaches more material to each definition. The typographical conventions in *A New Canting Dictionary* also demonstrate an advance in lexicographical technique; the author uses capitals for headwords, rather than italics, which distinguishes the headword from any embedded phrases within the entry and makes the dictionary easier to read. *A New Canting Dictionary* was successful and proved both an inspiration and a resource for several subsequent works of this period.

One such minor work is the anonymous miscellany, *Bacchus and Venus*, of 1738. It opens with 'A Select Collection of near 200 [actually 154] ... Songs and Catches' which are basically reprinted from the 1725 dictionary.⁶⁵ As such, the work does not have much to add to this discussion, but it reveals the popularity of *A New Canting Dictionary*.

One interesting work that comes from an 'authentic' source is *The Discoveries of John Poulter, alias Baxter*. John Poulter produced this book to atone for the robberies he had committed in the hope of escaping execution. This hope, however, was a vain one, as he was hanged in February 1754. The book is a kind of autobiography, wherein Poulter recounts the crimes he has committed, and describes the language and habits of contemporary robbers. The work is, as he writes: 'A full Account of the Robberies he has committed, and the surprising Tricks and Frauds he has practised for the Space of five Years last past, in different Parts of England.' He explains (along with the usual moral caution) that his book contains:

An exact Account of the Manner in which Gamblers and other Sharpers impose upon People at Fairs and other Places; wherein their whole Tricks, Behaviour and Language is so laid open, that anyone who reads it, may certainly know them at any Time, and so be upon their Guard against being cheated by them.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Noyes, 224.

⁶⁶ J. Poulter (otherwise Baxter). *The Discoveries of John Poulter, alias Baxter* (Seventh Edition). (Sherbourne: Printed for R Goadby, 1753) Title Page.

Poulter makes a relevant contribution to the knowledge of canting language. His work contains several expressions never before reported, and he displays novelty in dealing with the field, providing new names for old tricks and new information about the underworld. *The Discoveries* is divided into three parts: the first deals with a short autobiographical-confessional piece where the author reveals the nature of his crimes. This narrative is studded with several canting terms to make it sound realistic and more interesting, and occasionally the terms are glossed. The second part involves a description of specific criminal types. It is the third part, however, which is of most interest as it presents a short canting dictionary. Entitled, 'An Explanation of the Language of Thieves, commonly called Cant,' the glossary contains 157 terms, about two-thirds of which had never appeared in previous canting dictionaries or glossaries. The remainder of the terms are drawn from B.E.'s work, Smith's work or the 1725 *New Canting Dictionary*.

Another minor work of the mid-eighteenth century was *The Scoundrels Dictionary or, an Explanation of the Cant Words used by Thieves, House-Breakers, Street Robbers, and Pickpockets about Town*, produced by an anonymous author in 1754. This dictionary does not mark any development in the tradition of cant lexicography, being composed largely of reprints from previous works, such as the 1710 edition of B.E.'s dictionary and part three of Shirley's work of 1688 (taken from Head, 1673). Noyes suggests, however, that whereas Shirley's *Triumph of Wit* was intended for the diversion of the middle class, this dictionary seems to have had some contact with the beggars, as it concludes with an unusual plea for charity to honest beggars.⁶⁷

By this period, cant was no longer perceived as a secret language of thieves and beggars. Its steady incorporation of other 'low' varieties of English and its increasing exposure in various published texts meant that, by the early to mid-eighteenth century, cant had come to be recognised as a specialised social dialect.⁶⁸ The term 'cant' therefore became polysemous, which explains the appearance of other words and expressions to cover new areas. The word *flash* came into use c.1718 and was a popular term applied to the language of criminals until about 1850. *Slang* occurred as

⁶⁷ Noyes, 224.

⁶⁸ Gotti, 101.

a synonym for cant about 1750,⁶⁹ although the term soon broadened to describe the special phraseology of a particular calling or profession, and was later used to describe general colloquial lexis.⁷⁰ *Kiddy language* was also used frequently in the late eighteenth century, as thieves often addressed each other as 'My kiddy';⁷¹ however, none of the main texts dealing with the language of the underworld describe their work as *kiddy language*, nor is it used in any title. Another term which appeared later in the century was *St Giles's Greek*, after the London parish notorious as the resort of thieves and vagabonds, the 'Greek' referring to the incomprehensibility of the language, like *Pedlar's French*. Francis Grose refers to cant as St Giles's Greek in the preface to his *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*. The *vulgar tongue* of Grose's title was one expression which reflected cant's wider lexical scope that now included other dialects and non-standard varieties of English and had a greater presence in mainstream British English.⁷²

Captain Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* of 1785 makes an extremely significant contribution to the recorded vocabulary of cant and to the quality of such publications. This dictionary is the first authoritative study of cant and heralds a new era in canting lexicography. Although, when the book first appeared, Grose was charged with immorality in setting forth obscenities,⁷³ his work has had enduring appeal and a profound impact on the work of subsequent cant and slang compilers.

A noted antiquarian, Grose collected the scattered glossaries of cant and secret words and compiled them in one single volume. His dictionary draws material from Dekker, the *New Canting Dictionary* of 1725 (thus from B.E.) and Bailey, but his own contribution was extremely comprehensive. Grose carefully lists the works from which he gained some of his information:

[The cant] terms have been collected from the following Treatises: *The Bellman of London*, [1608] bringing to light the most notorious villanies that are now practised in the

⁶⁹ E. Partridge. *Slang To-day and Yesterday* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1933) 2.

⁷⁰ J. Ayto and J. A. Simpson. *The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Slang* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 1.

⁷¹ R. Langker. *Flash in New South Wales 1788-1850* (Sydney: University of Sydney Australian Language Research Centre, 1980) 2.

⁷² Gotti, 101.

⁷³ F. W. Chandler, 121.

kingdom... *English Villanies* ... London, 1638.⁷⁴ Bailey's, and the new canting dictionary, have also been consulted, with the History of Bamfylde More Carew,⁷⁵ the Sessions Papers, and other modern authorities.⁷⁶

The fact that Grose's study was comparatively extensive and that he actually acknowledged his sources displays a higher standard of scholarship and accuracy than that of previous cant lexicographers. Grose obviously believed this himself as, in the title, 'Classical' is used in the sense of 'constituting the first authority;' therefore, although he recognises the work of earlier authors, he still posits his own work as being the first 'real thing.'

The first edition of *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* contained about 3,000 entries. It was followed by a slightly enlarged edition in 1788 and a third in 1796 (the last to incorporate its editor's additions and corrections) with about 4,000 entries. The definitions themselves are very lively and interesting. Eric Partridge writes of Grose that: '[N]owhere more than in the Vulgar Tongue did he display his scholarship and industry, his wit and humour, his sympathetically keen understanding of human nature, and his gift of rendering interesting all that he touched.'⁷⁷ The dictionary contains 100 expressions first defined by Grose, some of which had appeared in previous literature, but not in specific publications dealing with cant. In line with current perceptions of his day, Grose sees *slang* and *cant* as synonymous, defining each term as:

CANTING, ... a kind of gibberish used by thieves and gypsies, called likewise pedlar's French, the slang, &c.
SLANG, cant language.

Despite the fact that Grose's dictionary outshines those of his predecessors, his lexicography is still somewhat unrefined. When compared to contemporary mainstream dictionaries such as Johnson's, Grose's work displays a much lesser degree of precision and scholarship. This is in keeping with previous works on cant, and probably due to the poorer educational backgrounds of those people familiar with

⁷⁴ In his 1874 bibliography of slang and cant publications, Hotten records the date of *English Villanies* as 1648.

⁷⁵ Grose makes reference here to two roguish pamphlets, *The Life and Adventures of Bamfylde-Moore Carew* (1745) and *An apology for the Life of Bamfylde-Moore Carew* (1749). The former contains a short list of canting terms borrowed from *A New Canting Dictionary* (1725); the definitions are reproduced verbatim, though without any exemplifications. The latter work does not contain any lexicographical material. As such, neither work adds anything to this discussion of the history and development of cant lexicography.

⁷⁶ F. Grose. *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (London: Printed for S. Hooper, 1785) iii-iv.

⁷⁷ Partridge. *Slang To-day and Yesterday*, 76.

the language of the London underworld (Grose, for example, did not go on to university as Johnson had). *The Vulgar Tongue* displays several discrepancies and inconsistencies in the arrangement and definition of words. Some of these are acknowledged by the author in his 'Additions and Corrections' page at the beginning of the dictionary, but many other mistakes have gone unseen; for example, there are words out of alphabetical order and also problematic exemplifications, as Gotti points out:

Grose's entries are often completed by an example; here too we can find lexicographical inconsistencies, as the exemplification sometimes does not refer to the item being defined, but to another grammatical category or even a derived form of the same lemma; in the following quotation, for instance, the headword is defined as a verb, but the example refers to a noun: 'to plump, to strike, or shoot: I'll give you a plump in the bread basket, or the victualling office, I'll give you a blow in the stomach.'⁷⁸

In other cases, the example does not add anything to the definition, and definitions are often augmented with personal opinion and subjective commentary, probably because of the author's great interest in the subculture he is describing.

The overall impression one gains from *The Vulgar Tongue*, however, is of a work carefully constructed and full of insight. The work is important not only because of the inclusion of new cant terminology, but because this terminology was included in a wider text devoted to the lexis of informal, non-standard varieties of English – a true innovation in publications of this kind. Grose's dictionary is valuable, entertaining and original, and deserves its inclusion as a prominent work in the history of British canting lexicography.

One of the last cant publications of the eighteenth century was George Parker's *Life's Painter of Variegated Characters in Public and Private Life*, which appeared in 1789. Parker was a soldier, traveller, itinerant actor and lecturer, and his book is made up of a series of anecdotes about himself and various other colourful personalities. *Life's Painter* begins with a biographical section, which details Parker's adventures with a group of beggars whom he joined in Dunkirk. This section is followed by an analysis of 74 discrete varieties of villain, with an analysis of the special techniques used by each.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Gotti, 101-112.

⁷⁹ Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 406.

Parker's cant glossary appears in Chapter 15. It contains 127 terms and expressions that Parker states were picked up during conversations with acquaintances from a wide range of social and criminal backgrounds. The glossary begins with a short preface, in which Parker praises his own lexicographical efforts and makes the standard claim that he has included the cant to preserve his readers' safety. He writes:

This explanation of the *Cant*, *Flash* and *Slang* terms, takes in the minutest trifle that relates to the chicanery of frauds, and gives at one view, a perfect knowledge of the artifices, combinations, modes and habits of those invaders of our privacy, our safety and our lives, who have a language quite unintelligible to any but themselves ... I have now only to say, that the man whose wish is to avoid the stratagems and schemes he is daily liable to fall into, I invite to bear me company, whilst I describe and explain the following terms.⁸⁰

The glossary is arranged in an unorthodox way, being divided into two sections. The first section lists the 127 terms in no particular order and without any definitions. The following section continues for some 35 pages and contains all of the terms again, in much the same order as they appeared in the initial list, but with extensive definitions and a large amount of anecdotal material. It is not clear why Parker chose to present his material in this way, but the initial list may have been intended as a kind of index. If this was the case, however, it seems strange that the terms were not listed in alphabetical order for ease of identification. Overall, Parker's glossary is not very accessible, and there are several inconsistencies. For example, some headwords entered in the initial list do not appear as headwords in the following section, but rather as phrases embedded under other headwords. In other cases, some words entered and defined as headwords also appear as embedded phrases in other parts of the glossary, leading to unnecessary repetition.

Parker does, however, include a significant number of terms that are not carried in Grose, and it seems highly unlikely, given the content of the glossary and its layout, that Grose's work was consulted. Parker's use of the terms *cant*, *flash* and *slang* is also interesting and consistent with the period in which he was writing. He defines the terms synonymously, but seems unsure of which actual term to use when describing his glossary, giving the impression that at this point, no concrete distinctions had been established.

⁸⁰ G. Parker. *Life's Painter of Variegated Characters in Public and Private Life* (Second Edition.) (Dublin: Published for the Author, c.1790) 144-147.

On the whole, Parker's *Life's Painter* is a useful addition to this history. Although it is not full-length and it displays a considerable regression in lexicographical technique when compared to Grose, it demonstrates that many cant terms that differed from those discovered and listed by Grose were in use at the same time in other parts of England and Ireland.

Overview 1612 – 1790

The period 1612 – 1790 saw major developments in cant lexicography. Many practices established in the early period 1530 – 1612 were built upon; for example, it became much more common for cant lexicographers to morally justify their inclusion of canting terminology. After it became redundant for these authors to justify their material on the grounds of social reform, many defended their work by arguing that information about the language of criminals was intended either as a caution to their readers to help them avoid being taken advantage of by criminals, to prevent them from falling into the same habits as criminals, or simply to highlight their readers' own virtues. This practice was so widespread that it became almost a standard convention; for example, as in Head (1673), Coles (1676), Shirley (1688), N.H. (or John Dunton) (1694), Tuus Inimicus (1703), Smith (1714), Poulter (1754), and Parker (1789). Possibly as a result of the ambivalence these authors felt (or had to be seen to feel) towards their subject matter, many chose pseudonyms, were identified only by their initials, or chose to remain anonymous. Despite the fact that cant was perceived as an unsavoury topic, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw a marked rise in the popularity and status of cant, through its inclusion in comprehensive full-length works such as B.E.'s dictionary (c.1698), the *New Canting Dictionary* (1725) and Grose's *Vulgar Tongue* (1785); in mainstream dictionaries such as Coles' (1676) and Bailey's (1737); and in the *Ladies Dictionary* (1694). The influence of rogue fiction and the rogue biography upon the development of cant lexicography continued throughout this period, as seen in Head (1665), Smith (1714) and Poulter (1754). Gradually, cant terms denoted an increasingly wide range of criminal types; in addition to beggars, vagabonds and swindlers, terms were coined for cheats, murderers, shoplifters, highwaymen, burglars, thieves, pickpockets, and prison inmates (Inimicus (1703) describes debtors and sexual offenders). There were also

more detailed descriptions of women of the underworld in the roles of prison inmates, beggars, prostitutes and the general criminal associates of men.

Plagiarism remained a key characteristic of the development of cant lexicography during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Harman was still the main source during the early part of this period, followed by Head (1673), B.E. (c.1698) and *A New Canting Dictionary* (1725). There was also a development in lexicographical conventions and approach. Several authors discussed their methodology and acknowledged their sources, for example, Head (1673), B.E. and Grose, demonstrating a more scholarly treatment of cant. Dictionaries of this period were characterised by fuller and livelier definitions, incorporating embedded phrases, example sentences and notes about the headwords' ranges of use, as in Head, B.E., the 1725 dictionary, and Grose. Canting songs and cant conversations were also retained in most of these publications. Secrecy was no longer the main reason for the use of cant, and by the latter half of the eighteenth century cant was a specialised social dialect, incorporating other non-standard varieties of English, as demonstrated in Grose. Consequently, new terminology developed to describe these different aspects of cant, such as *flash*, *slang*, *kiddy language*, *the vulgar tongue* and *St Giles's Greek*.

Records of British Canting Language 1790 – 1904

The works discussed in this section are: *Lexicon Balatronicum* (1811); *Bang-Up Dictionary* (1812); Pierce Egan's *Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, with the Addition of Numerous Slang Phrases* (1823); *The Flash Dictionary* (1821); H. Brandon's *Poverty, Mendicity and Crime* (1839); *Sinks of London Laid Open* (1848); Ducange Anglicanus' *The Vulgar Tongue: A Glossary of Slang, Cant, and Flash Words and Phrases Used in London from 1839 to 1859* (1857); John Camden Hotten's *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (1859); Albert Barrère's and Charles Leland's *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant* (1889-1890); and John Farmer's and W. E. Henley's *Slang and its Analogues Past and Present* (1890-1904).

Grose's *Vulgar Tongue* dominated the character and trend of cant for the first two decades of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ Most of the dictionaries of this period were little more than plagiarisms of Grose, with slight modifications to suit the authors' specific purposes. One such dictionary of some merit is the *Lexicon Balatronicum*.⁸² A *Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit, and Pickpocket Eloquence*, published in 1811 by a collaborative group of authors, including 'A Member of the Whip Club,' Hell-Fire Dick, James Gordon and one William Soames, described as 'Esq. Of the Hon Society of Newman's Hotel' (Newgate Prison).

Although the *Lexicon* is largely based on the third edition of Grose's dictionary, Grose is given only a modest credit – one line on the introductory page – followed hastily by the statement that this 1811 edition is 'now considerably altered and enlarged, with the modern changes and improvements.'⁸³ Some advertisements also claimed that the dictionary had been edited by one Dr Hewson Clarke.⁸⁴ Despite all this, the fact that the book is also known as the *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* obviously implicates Grose in its conception. The authors of the 1811 dictionary declare that although Grose's book was popular:

its circulation was confined almost exclusively to the lower orders of society: he [Grose] was not aware at the time of its compilation, that our young men of fashion would at no very distant period be as distinguished for the vulgarity of their jargon as the inhabitants of Newgate; and he therefore conceived it superfluous to incorporate with his work the few examples of fashionable slang that might occur to his observation.⁸⁵

This comment is significant, as it is evidence for the wider usage that cant/slang was now enjoying and the more varied sources from which it drew.

The 1811 *Lexicon* therefore includes several new terms not carried in Grose. Although most of these new terms are, as stated by the authors, examples of fashionable slang, the dictionary does contain the first citations of the terms, *pig* = a policeman, and *lag* = a man transported, that is, a transported convict, and nowadays applied to a prison inmate. Interestingly, the *Lexicon* also includes one of the first mentions of rhyming slang terminology, with *blue ruin* = gin. Aside from the

⁸¹ E. Partridge. *Slang To-day and Yesterday*, 76.

⁸² The translation of *Lexicon Balatronicum* is 'Jester's Dictionary.' Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 410.

⁸³ 'A Member of the Whip Club', Hell-Fire Dick, et al. *Lexicon Balatronicum: A Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit, and Pickpocket Eloquence* (1811). (Northfield, Illinois: Digest Books, 1971)

Title page. Subsequently cited as *Lexicon Balatronicum*.

⁸⁴ Hotten. *The Slang Dictionary*, 378.

⁸⁵ *Lexicon Balatronicum*, v.

additional entries, however, the dictionary displays virtually no development in terms of layout and other lexicographical conventions.

The 1811 *Lexicon* was followed by the *Bang-up Dictionary*, issued by an anonymous author in 1812. This text amounts to yet another edition of the original *Vulgar Tongue*, despite the author's claims that this is a dictionary of the slang of the fashionable world. J. C. Hotten succinctly describes the work as 'A vulgar performance, consisting of pilferings from Grose, and made up with meanings of a degraded character.'⁸⁶ Another similar adaptation appeared eleven years later in 1823 under the title of *Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, with the Addition of Numerous Slang Phrases*; once more, as the title suggests, this is simply Grose's dictionary altered occasionally, with the addition of racing and boxing slang. It is most likely that the editor, Pierce Egan, incorporated these entries not so much to 'improve' Grose, but to advertise his own journal, *Life in London*, and the forthcoming edition of his *Boxiana, or, Sketches of Modern Pugilism*. The similarity to Grose's text has led the dictionary to be known as 'Egan's Grose.'⁸⁷ Egan does, however, include a short biography of Grose, and some critics have listed this work as the best edition of Grose.⁸⁸

In 1821 *The Flash Dictionary* was published by an anonymous author. The small book was not based on Grose, and itself became a source for several subsequent publications. *The Flash Dictionary* contains a 55-page glossary, listing a considerable number of flash terms and expressions, including rhyming slang, with brief definitions. The rest of the *Dictionary* is taken up with a discussion of 'Sixty Orders of Prime Coves' and some flash songs.⁸⁹

In 1839 H. Brandon, Esq. edited *Poverty, Mendicity and Crime*, initially a report presented to the House of Lords. A 'Dictionary of the Flash and Cant Language, Known to Every Thief and Beggar' appeared in the report, consisting of substantial

⁸⁶ Hotten. *The Slang Dictionary*, 273.

⁸⁷ Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 412.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Partridge (1933).

⁸⁹ J. Franklyn. *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang* (Second Edition, 1961.) (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989) 5.

extracts reprinted from *The Flash Dictionary*.⁹⁰ *The Flash Dictionary* made yet another appearance in 1848 as an appendix to *The Sinks of London Laid Open*. The anonymous author of the 1848 text enters some additional terms and notes, but makes no acknowledgement of the earlier source.

Ducange Anglicanus' (also recorded as Anglicus) *The Vulgar Tongue: A Glossary of Slang, Cant, and Flash Words and Phrases Used in London from 1839 to 1859*, published in 1857 with a second edition in 1859, draws upon Grose's dictionary as the title implies, and upon *The Flash Dictionary*. Despite Hotten's description of the work as 'A silly and childish performance, full of blunders and contradictions,'⁹¹ it contains some noteworthy features. Anglicanus' *Vulgar Tongue* includes some short passages of cant, some poems that make use of canting terminology, some flash songs and their translations, and two short glossaries. The first glossary comprises terms collected by the author from various sources, and the second contains material taken from Brandon's 1839 publication (and hence from *The Flash Dictionary*). The terms *slang*, *cant* and *flash* seem to be treated synonymously here to describe the language of the underworld and various social substrata. The text's main interest, however, lies in the large number of rhyming slang terms that are included. This is the first dictionary to list rhyming terms in considerable number, which is significant, as rhyming slang becomes a key feature of later underworld and prison language both in Britain and overseas.

The early to mid-nineteenth century witnessed a sharp rise in the amount of underworld terminology. The social upheavals of the Industrial Revolution, the new affluence flaunted by the wealthy, the wretchedness of beggars and scavengers in filthy urban slums, the widespread unemployment, and the absence of an organised police force until 1829 all spawned crime on a massive scale. As one pamphleteer of the period wrote: 'Highway robbers threaten the traveller ... by night [and] day ... the lurking footpad lies like an adder in our roads and streets ... the horrid burglar, like an evil spirit, haunts our dwellings, making night hideous.'⁹² Consequently, the language of the underworld expanded and adapted to accommodate the large number of people

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ Hotten, *The Slang Dictionary*, 376.

⁹² B. Ralph Lewis. 'Transportation.' *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. Winston Churchill ed. Volume 6. (London: Purnell, 1965) 3071.

joining the criminal class. At the same time, the more general informal lexis that had come into vogue in the mid-eighteenth century was becoming increasingly popular among several groups in British society. As a result, it was no longer sufficient to treat the terms *cant*, *slang* and *flash* synonymously, as it was apparent that more than one distinct variety was in operation. Therefore, *cant* was once again applied to the language of criminals, whereas *slang* was used to describe the more recent informal lexis used by a people from a wide range of social backgrounds. The term *flash* became superfluous and quickly lost popularity. By the 1850s, both *cant* and *slang* were used widely and had accrued a large number of lexical items. For the first time, the varieties were comprehensive enough to accommodate serious, in-depth lexicographical studies.

It is at this point in the mid-nineteenth century that adaptations of Grose and *The Flash Dictionary* peter out in favour of more serious studies of slang undertaken by Victorian amateur scholars. These main dictionaries of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were vastly more comprehensive, bringing *cant* and *slang* lexicography to new heights in terms of accuracy and detail. The first such dictionary was *A Dictionary of Modern Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words*,⁹³ compiled by John Camden Hotten and published in 1859. Hotten was a journalistic writer, bohemian and self-described 'London Antiquary' who deliberately mixed with members of the underworld to observe them and to note their language.

As well as *cant* words and phrases, Hotten deals with everyday slang current in Victorian England. Significantly, he is the first lexicographer to draw a distinction between *slang* and *cant*:

Now the word CANT in its old sense, and SLANG in its modern application, although used by good writers and persons of education as synonymes, are in reality quite distinct and separate terms. CANT, apart from religious hypocrisy, refers to the old secret language, by allegory or distinct terms, of Gipsies, thieves, tramps and beggars. SLANG represents that evanescent, vulgar language, ever changing with fashion and taste, which has principally come into vogue during the last seventy or eighty years, spoken by persons in every grade of life, rich and poor, honest and dishonest. CANT is old; SLANG is always modern and changing.⁹⁴

⁹³ In some cases, the word *Language* is substituted; for example, the spine of the 1859 edition reads *Vulgar Words*, whereas the title page reads *Vulgar Language*.

⁹⁴ J. C. Hotten. *A Dictionary of Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1859) Preface, vii.

Hotten provides separate chapters on the histories of both slang and cant. From a lexicographical point of view, the dictionary is rich in information. Hotten provides full definitions and good etymologies for about 3,000 headwords, sometimes providing literary citations or direct quotations from the word's derivative source. Hotten also incorporates an account and glossary of back slang (a type of slang where words are spelled and, as far as possible, pronounced backwards), an account and glossary of rhyming slang, and a glossary of centre slang (formed by making the central vowel of a word its initial letter and then adding sufficient vowels and consonants to make the jumble of letters function phonologically as a word). These accounts constitute the first authoritative discussions of these slang varieties. In addition, Hotten provides a detailed annotated bibliography of slang and cant publications. Interestingly, Hotten's morality and his reluctance to offend his readership overcome his lexicographical integrity, as he chooses to exclude all 'obscene' words in his work.

Hotten's dictionary went through many subsequent editions, and the fifth edition of 1874, issued under the new title of *The Slang Dictionary: Etymological, Historical and Anecdotal*, includes several modifications. Although Hotten omits his original preface and the device of putting summary headings on each page, he adds a considerable body of new information and examples to explanatory sections, and comments upon the changes and developments which have taken place since the first edition. Hotten also enlarges the sections of the history of slang and of back slang, expands upon his general comments about the nature of slang, and adds at least 30 new references to the bibliography. This revised bibliography remained the best in its field for nearly forty years. The dictionary itself is also substantially augmented. Hotten's dictionary, particularly the later edition, is an invaluable reference work, not only as a record of slang and cant usage in the mid-nineteenth century, but as a means of tracing the changes and developments which occurred during that period.⁹⁵

A poorer work in this category is Albert Barrère's and Charles Leland's *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant*, which appeared 1889-1890. The work has merit, although it lacks sophistication in both its prefatory content and its lexicographical

⁹⁵ J. Widdowson. Preface to J. C. Hotten's *The Slang Dictionary* (London: East Ardsley, 1972) vi-viii.

conventions; for example, the authors take a very uninformed and naïve approach to slang, underestimating their readers' probable familiarity with Hotten, and quotations in the dictionary are undated and of limited use. To be fair, however, the main problem with the dictionary is its bad timing, as it is often compared to Farmer's and Henley's major work, the first volume of which appeared at the same time as *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant*. Barrère and Leland did in fact take the advice of several notable consultants, including Major Arthur Griffiths, a former inspector of prisons and governor of Millbank and Wormwood Scrubs Prisons, and Sir Patrick Colquhoun, a multilingual diplomat and author. The dictionary was also the first of such publications to include American slang.⁹⁶

One of the foremost dictionaries of this period was produced by John Farmer, assisted by the poet W. E. Henley. *Slang and its Analogues Past and Present* was published in seven volumes over 14 years between 1890 and 1904, and constitutes one of the most comprehensive approaches ever taken to slang varieties of language. Although *Slang and its Analogues* covers many slang varieties, cant features significantly. Farmer draws strongly upon Vaux and Grose and several other earlier cant authors, and his work is established as the best work on British cant until Eric Partridge's 1949 publication.

Farmer was a pioneer in slang and canting lexicography. The dictionary contains sound definitions, embellished with shrewd, scholarly and entertaining comments, as well as upwards of 100,000 illustrative quotations which have been conscientiously researched. Farmer displays a great insight into the nature and tendencies of slang, and the psychology of its users. Although this dictionary does not reach the relative sophistication of standard dictionaries of the time such as the *New English Dictionary*⁹⁷ (then in progress), it adopts the same historical method, charting 300 years of recorded cant and slang vocabulary. Farmer's work influenced the opinion of scholars, and served to promote slang to a subject worthy of serious modern academic study.

⁹⁶ Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 426.

⁹⁷ Later known as the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

Overview 1790 – 1904

In the history of British canting lexicography, the period 1790 – 1904 may be neatly divided into two halves: 1790 – 1859, during which most dictionaries produced were plagiarisms and adaptations either of Grose or the 1821 *Flash Dictionary*; and 1859 – 1904, characterised by the output of substantial dictionaries by Victorian amateur scholars. Not surprisingly during this first period, there was not a great advance in recorded vocabulary or lexicographical technique, the works being based to such a large extent on previous sources; however, rhyming slang became more apparent as a colourful component of underworld language, as seen in *The Sinks of London Laid Open* (1848) and *Anglicanus* (1857). Possibly because of the obvious plagiarism in these works, many authors wrote under pseudonyms or chose to remain anonymous.

It was during the second period that the most significant lexicographical advancements occurred. One such advancement was the large number of headwords entered in the dictionaries, as seen especially with Farmer's and Henley's work (1890 – 1904). This reflected the increasing amount of underworld language and general informal lexis being devised, due largely to the sudden and disruptive social changes of the nineteenth century. Because by the mid-nineteenth century the variety referred to synonymously as *cant*, *flash* or *slang* had expanded to incorporate not only the language of criminals and selected non-standard British dialects, but the fashionable slang of university students, sportsmen and 'bucks,' it became necessary to create distinctions within this amorphous variety. This signalled a return to a more conservative definition of *cant*, as opposed to *slang*. The term *cant* was reserved for the old and enduring secret language of criminals, such as thieves, tramps, beggars and Gypsies; whereas *slang* was defined as the transient vulgar language spoken by a wider range of people, with its origins in early to mid-eighteenth century society. Consequently, *flash* became a redundant term and, by about 1850, was no longer used in Britain.

The dictionaries of the latter nineteenth century also incorporated literary citations, illustrative quotations and example sentences, and offered scholarly attempts at etymology, often relating *cant* and *slang* in Britain to similar varieties in other languages, as in Hotten (1859) and Farmer. Prefatory and supplementary material

became fuller and more accurate. Hotten, Farmer (and to a lesser extent, Barrère and Leland (1889-1890)), provided erudite accounts of the history and nature of cant and slang, and lexicological discussions of their own material. The works of this period also demonstrated a more scientific approach to the compilation of slang and cant records; data was referenced and dated, and Hotten even provided a comprehensive bibliography of the slang and cant publications that he had encountered during his research. Canting songs do not generally figure in these later works, unless referred to specifically in the body of the dictionary. It is interesting to note that, despite their high levels of scholarship, these later authors still felt a Victorian reserve toward their subject matter, as seen, for example, with Hotten's refusal to include any 'obscene' terms or expressions.

Records of British Canting Language 1904 – 2000

The works discussed in this section are: Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (1937) and *Dictionary of the Underworld* (1949); Tempest's *Lag's Lexicon* (1950); Morton's *Lowspeak* (1980); and Devlin's *Prison Patter* (1996).

During the early twentieth century, the term *cant* lost popularity and was replaced by *argot*, *lingo* and *jargon* as synonymous terms. Because *argot* is technically the most accurate term for the specialist language of the criminally imprisoned and members of criminal subcultures, it will be the term used in this review in lieu of *cant*. The term *slang* continued to be used to describe general informal lexis, but also indicated wider contexts of origin for certain varieties; for example, 'prison slang,' 'street slang' or 'sexual slang.'

Although the early twentieth century saw changes in the terminology used to describe non-standard and criminal varieties of English, the presence of major dictionaries such as Hotten's and Farmer's also served to stabilise the vocabularies of these varieties, slowing their rate of change. In the early 1930s, Partridge wrote that:

It is certain that slang has, since 1859, changed less rapidly than it did before that date: perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the slang of 1859-1874 survived almost intact until the Great War, that a surprising amount of that old slang still survives, and that much of the slang current in the 1860's has actually become incorporated in English

colloquial and familiar speech by being promoted from the stage of slang. This fixing and dignifying of so much of that mid-Victorian slang is due mainly to the steady, continuous popularity of Hotten's glossary, partly to the reinforcing influence of that great lexicographical enterprise, Farmer's seven-volume *Slang and its Analogues*.⁹⁸

Possibly as a result, after Farmer and Henley, no major dictionary of slang and the underworld was published in Britain until Eric Partridge's own *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* in 1937. The dictionary is largely devoted to slang, but also includes argot and is an in-depth, wide ranging resource that is well-researched and compiled with meticulous attention to detail. However, although this dictionary is useful, it is Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld* of 1949 that is most pertinent to this discussion and has had the most profound impact upon underworld lexicography during the twentieth century.

A Dictionary of the Underworld: Being the Vocabularies of Crooks, Criminals, Racketeers, Beggars and Tramps, Convicts, The Commercial Underworld, The Drug Traffic, The White Slave Traffic, Spivs is a hugely ambitious and extremely comprehensive dictionary, concentrating upon the specialist language of the underworld. This work is certainly the most famous of such dictionaries produced during the twentieth century and is the source that many subsequent underworld and prison lexicographers have turned to for verification of their own material. Because the dictionary was published in London it may be counted as a British work, but it also includes several hundred American terms (marked *) and a significant amount of South African, Australian and New Zealand vocabulary. The layout of Partridge's dictionary is also fully professional: he provides part-of-speech labels, illustrative quotations drawn from a huge range of previous cant dictionaries and literary works, dates for quotations, origins, and etymologies. Prison vocabulary also figures to a considerable extent.

It is the enlarged third edition of the *Dictionary of the Underworld*, issued in 1968, which is recognised as the finest. Here, Partridge includes an alphabetised addenda containing previously unrecorded terms and new senses for terms recorded in earlier editions. Through his work, Partridge made a huge critical contribution to the history and understanding of slang and argot, which he continued up until his death in 1979.

⁹⁸ Partridge. *Slang To-day and Yesterday* 95-96.

It was during the early to mid-twentieth century that prison argot became recognised as an important aspect of the language of the underworld. Most previous cant lexicographers had focused upon the language of the free underworld, but as the model of the 'modern prison' developed and became more widespread, it created its own subworld with its own peculiar linguistic variety. The establishment of the first modern prison in England (Pentonville, 1842), a move made after the abandonment of the 'hulks' (convict ships), marked the advent of the penal institution as we know it today,⁹⁹ and thus provided the particular social medium that has created modern prison argot. The modern prison introduced new spatial restrictions, power dynamics, frameworks of interpersonal relationships and systems of punishment, and therefore produced a new physical, emotional and cognitive environment. The distinctive language of prison inmates was one reaction to this particular environment, and emphasised the in-group identity and psychological distinctiveness of a group segregated from the mainstream. The years after the Second World War, in particular, saw a marked growth in the number of prisons being built and the evolution of a definite prison culture. As a result, from the mid-twentieth century onwards, dictionaries were produced which concentrated upon the steadily developing language of prison inmates.

The first full-length prison-specific dictionary was Paul Tempest's *Lag's Lexicon: A Comprehensive Dictionary and Encyclopaedia of the English Prison of To-day*, which appeared in 1950. *Lag's Lexicon* was produced by Tempest after he had spent time in six British prisons while serving a five-year sentence for manslaughter. He writes that: 'This *Lag's Lexicon* was compiled for a variety of reasons, with the object of entertainment, amusement, or enlightenment. Its apparent uses are manifold, whether looked on as a bedside book to be dipped into or as a reliable reference book.'¹⁰⁰ Although not specifically designed for an academic readership, the work is nevertheless scholarly, reliable and detailed. It is set out in glossary format, containing several hundred headwords with full definitions; however, it is much more than a simple dictionary. Most of the definitions are supplemented with usage notes,

⁹⁹ G. Newbold. 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' 118.

¹⁰⁰ P. Tempest. *Lag's Lexicon* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950) v.

anecdotes, biographical information and etymologies. In many cases, the information appended to the definition amounts to a brief encyclopaedic essay on the headword.

Tempest includes several interesting drug and rhyming slang terms, and also includes terms which are not prison argot, but are rather the names of people or organisations that have particular relevance for prison inmates, such as prison reformer John Howard, the Howard League and the Salvation Army. Further mainstream English terms are listed to enable the author to make some comment about prison operations or the prison system, for example: '*laundry*. Nearly every prison has its own laundry, in which a small party of prisoners work under an officer...' or: '*X-rays*. A number of prison hospitals are equipped with X-ray units.' Therefore, although not all the terms listed are examples of the language of prison inmates, this type of lexicography allows readers a unique insight into the experience of incarceration in British prisons during the mid-twentieth century.

Probably due to the continued popularity of Partridge's dictionaries, it was not until 1989 that another author attempted a dictionary of underworld and prison language. James Morton compiled *Lowspeak: A Dictionary of Criminal and Sexual Slang* using terminology gathered from criminals during his work as a criminal defence lawyer and from previous sources such as Partridge and Tempest. Morton's glossary of several hundred headwords represents the recent British criminal scene: the courts, the character and organisation of the modern British prison, and the drug trade. The work is popular rather than scholarly, aiming to give readers an idea of the argot of the day, and is therefore not based upon historical principles. Morton also incorporates a smattering of American and Australian vocabulary. He attempts to provide derivations, but these are very simple, usually only listing the country of use or origin, and no dates are given. There are no part-of-speech labels for the headwords, and sometimes, the headwords are placed in the past tense or in the plural. Despite this, Morton's work is extremely interesting; his many new terms make a valuable contribution to recorded underworld terminology and allow a useful insight into recent and emerging trends in British underworld and prison lexis.

The most recent prison dictionary is Angela Devlin's *Prison Patter: A Dictionary of Prison Words and Slang*, published in 1996. Significantly, Devlin is the first female

author in the history of British underworld lexicography. *Prison Patter* lists 2,500 terms and expressions gathered from several hundred inmates in a number of British prisons. The terms were elicited by means of questionnaires published in the prison newspaper *Inside Time* in the early 1990s. Devlin worked as a special needs teacher and had her first contact with prison inmates while collecting material for her first book, *Criminal Classes*, which explored the links between educational underachievement and later offending behaviour. She originally compiled a brief glossary to appear in *Criminal Classes* but was encouraged to enlarge this and to produce a dictionary. Devlin uses more structured methodology than Morton, although both take advantage of their professions to observe their subjects. The fact that a majority of Devlin's subjects were female is useful as this represents an alternative view of prison life and culture, and consequently introduces previously unrecorded terminology, such as *BFM* = an inmate who is currently a breast-feeding mother.

Prison Patter begins with a lexicological discussion, divided into the sections: Introduction; Content and Methodology; Derivations and Explanation; Rhyming Slang and Backslang; The Secret Drugs Code; Jailers and the Jailed; Scenes from Prison Life; and Glossaries and Lists of Prison Words. In this last section, Devlin makes reference to the work of some prominent prison lexicographers, such as Bentley and Corbett, Donald Clemmer (the United States), Eric Partridge, and Ulla Bondeson (Scandinavia), but notes that very little work has been undertaken in the field of prison lexicography. Devlin also provides a very useful paragraph about prison glossaries compiled in Britain, which would otherwise not have found their way into this discussion:

In England and Wales there have been at least three internal Prison Service Documents. The first, a short *Glossary of terms and slang common in penal establishments*, was produced for Boards of Visitors in 1978. Ten years later, a second and more substantial document was produced by the Education Department at HMP Frankland, mainly for use by foreign national prisoners. The third document, *Welcome to the Prison Service* (Home Office, 1992) contained a glossary as part of a general introduction for new prison officers [and a] short list of prison terms compiled by staff at HMP Hindley and contained in the *Prison Visits Training Pack* produced by the Magistrates' Association (1996).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ A. Devlin. *Prison Patter: A Dictionary of Prison Words and Slang* (Winchester: Waterside, 1996) 19.

Devlin is obviously unaware of Tempest's and Morton's contributions, as she claims that in Britain: 'As far as I know, no other fully fledged dictionary of prison words and slang has been produced.'¹⁰² In spite of her lack of knowledge of other similar dictionaries, Devlin's dictionary is still extremely interesting and valuable. Several rhyming slang terms appear, and drug terminology features widely in her wordlist, indicative of the recent advances in science and medicine which have created a proliferation of available drugs, and demonstrating the nature of the criminal market at the end of the twentieth century. Formal lexicographical conventions such as part-of-speech labels are omitted, but Devlin provides full definitions with helpful cross-references and further notes to aid the reader's understanding of each term. *Prison Patter* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the argot of the modern (women's) prison and brings the development of British underworld lexicography into the twenty-first century.

Overview 1904 – 2000

As with the nineteenth century, the twentieth century may be divided into two chief periods: 1904 – 1949, dominated by the chief works of the late nineteenth century and, following the First World War, Partridge's comprehensive publications; and 1950 – 2000, which witnessed, as a result of the growth of the prisons after the Second World War and the rise in sociology as a discipline, a move away from studies of the free underworld to studies that focused upon the language of prison inmates. The early to mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of high standards of modern scholarship, as in Partridge (1937, 1949), with dictionaries containing professional formatting, literary citations and full, accurate etymologies, along with a careful referencing of all sources. As a result, plagiarism was not a characteristic of underworld/prison lexicography of this period. The initial prison glossaries, such as Tempest's (1950) were simpler, developing into more professional dictionaries during the later twentieth century. Possibly as an influence of the sociological approach, the definitions in Tempest, Morton (1980) and Devlin (1996) were supplemented with information about the prison culture.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

It is interesting to note that, especially in the second half of this century, the moral ambivalence towards the language of prison and the free underworld disappeared. Although some authors, (for example, Devlin) acknowledged that some readers were likely to be shocked or offended, they made no apology for their inclusion of 'obscene' material, nor made any attempt to omit it. Once more, this attitude reflects a sociological approach to fieldwork, with an emphasis on presenting collected data accurately and objectively.

In the same way as earlier cant reflected the society of its period, the argot in these works mirrored the society of the twentieth century. The argot terms coined during the 1900s represented new crimes and types of criminals, the justice system, and the lifestyle of the modern prison. Also, for the first time, female criminals were the focus of a study that described their own specific prison terminology, beginning a new chapter in the history of British canting lexicography.

THE UNITED STATES

Records of American Canting Language 1790 – 1904

The works discussed in this section are: Smith's *The Confession &c. of Thomas Mount* (1791); Tufts' *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels and Sufferings of Henry Tufts* (1807); 'The Flash Language' (1848); and George W. Matsell's *Vocabularum* (1859).

No records of cant usage exist in North America until the very end of the eighteenth century, although such language certainly must have existed previously; the convicts transported to Virginia and Maryland during the early seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, for example, doubtless brought cant expressions with them from England. Modern American prison argot seems to have, as its ultimate source, sixteenth century British cant, which is evident in the flash language recorded by the very early American criminals and cant lexicographers. Much of this earlier American

underworld terminology was either the same as, or an easily recognisable development of, English cant and slang.¹⁰³

As, at this point in the late eighteenth century *flash* was still a popular term used to describe the language of the underworld, publications of this era reflect this vogue and the term *cant* rarely features. Probably the first American flash lexicon appeared in William Smith's *The Confession of Thomas Mount* in 1791. As the title suggests, Smith's story is based upon the confession and dying words of Thomas Mount, a highwayman and burglar who, along with one James Williams, was executed for his crimes on May 27 1791, at Little-Rest, Rhode Island. The main text involves a short autobiography, detailing Mount's childhood, his introduction to crime and the criminal underworld, his adventures as a burglar, his spells in prison and his eventual demise. At the end of this section is appended Mount's 'Last Speech and Dying Words,' and a 'Lamentation.' The final section of the work concerns a glossary entitled, 'The Flash Language,' along with some flash songs and a criminal's oath of initiation. The author's note that prefaces this section acknowledges the novelty of flash in America, treating it not as a separate variety, but as an imported British phenomenon:

The Flash Company in London ... had a language peculiar to themselves, and books printed in the language; Mount says he never saw any of those books, but Williams confessed to the publisher of these papers, that he had seen them in London, and one of them in the possession of a J. S——rs, in Jacksonborough, South Carolina. – This language has been taken notice of in some British magazines, but little information communicated concerning it; and therefore, to gratify the public, the following dictionary of the Flash language (so far as could be obtained from Mount and Williams) together with several Flash Songs and the oath they administer to flats (as they call the novices in the art of thieving) when they are admitted into the Flash Society, are added.¹⁰⁴

The glossary itself comprises 116 items set out in two unalphabetised lists, one containing 89 flash words and the other containing 27 flash phrases. The definitions are very brief and, interestingly, the first list is set out with the definition preceding the term, unlike the second list, which has a conventional format. As indicated by Smith's prefatory comments, most of the terms listed are identical to British cant.

¹⁰³ E. Partridge. 'The American Underworld and English Cant.' In G. Irwin (ed). *American Tramp and Underworld Slang* (London: Scholartis Press, 1931) 255.

¹⁰⁴ W. Smith. *The Confession &c. of Thomas Mount* (Newport: Printed and sold by Peter Edes, 1791) 18.

Another early glossary appeared in Henry Tufts' criminal autobiography of 1807, *A Narrative of the Life, Adventures, Travels and Sufferings of Henry Tufts*. The book is concerned mainly with a description of Tufts' crimes and adventures, but he provides a brief list of flash words that he apparently learnt from *flashmen* while serving time in a Massachusetts prison in 1794:

A number of my fellow prisoners were flashmen, (as they termed themselves) an appellation appropriate to such rogues and sharpers, as make exclusive use of the flash lingo. This is partly English and party [sic] an arbitrary gibberish, which, when spoken, presents to such hearers, as are not initiated into its mysteries, a mere unintelligible jargon, but in the flash fraternity is, peculiarly, significant.¹⁰⁵

Containing 75 terms and expressions, the unalphabetised glossary is a mixture of pre-recorded British cant terms and new additions. Tufts states that the flash language demonstrated in his glossary 'was imported in gross from Europe, and no part of it, to my knowledge, has been hitherto communicated to the public.'¹⁰⁶

In the 1930 reprint of Tufts' text (the only subsequent edition ever printed), Edmund Pearson notes that:

This [glossary] may be one of the earliest vocabularies of slang published in this country. The words, Tufts says, are English in origin. His remark that they were "imported in gross" from Europe seems almost a punning acknowledgement to Francis Grose's *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*. But I do not find that they are taken verbatim from any edition of Grose available to me.¹⁰⁷

This appears to be true, although Tufts lists several terms that appear both in Grose's text and in the works of previous cant lexicographers, but with spelling and pronunciation differences. For example, the documented *quad* or *quod* = prison, appears here without the final 'd': *qua* = jail; *qua keeper* = a jail keeper; *undub the qua* = unlock the jail; *crack the qua* = break the jail. This provides evidence of an American variant of the term, as Smith first recorded *quæ* as an alternative for *quod*.

In 1848, a further glossary was published in an anonymous article for *The Ladies Repository*, a middle-class periodical. The article, 'The Flash Language,' contains a more lengthy collection of flash terms than had previously been compiled, gathered from an inmate at Western Penitentiary in Pittsburgh. The author stresses that '[R]ogues have a language of their own, by which they can converse freely with each

¹⁰⁵ H. Tufts (ed. Edmund Pearson). *The Autobiography of a Criminal: Henry Tufts* (New York: Duffield, 1930) 291.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ E. Pearson. Note in *ibid.*, 294.

other, without risk of being detected by listeners unacquainted with its terms,' and provides examples of how flash is used by criminals for the purposes of identification. (S)he mentions that flash 'came to this country from England, though many new terms have been added to it here.'¹⁰⁸ Many of the 204 words and expressions listed in the glossary display similarities with British cant: the traditional *cove* = man, *lay* = trick, crime, *ken* = house, and *prig* = thief appear, as do several other established British terms, such as *darbies* = manacles or fetters, *chiv* = a knife, and *screw* = a false key. Some British terms have undergone spelling changes, for example, the well-documented *Kinchin Lay* = the crime of robbing children sent on errands with money or any valuable article, appears here as *Kinchen Lay*.¹⁰⁹ The glossary does however, list a significant number of previously unrecorded items of American flash, and demonstrates how new flash terms are coined from existing terms, for example: *moat* = river; *moat palace* = steamboat; *knuck* = to pick pockets; *knucksman* or *knucker* = pickpocket; *mang* = to talk; *mangsman* = lawyer. Therefore, although the glossary provides only brief definitions and little etymology, it adds considerably to our knowledge of the vocabulary and structure of this underworld variety.

During the early to mid-nineteenth century, as in Britain, the United States witnessed a sharp rise in the amount of cant being used. Much of this cant was transported from England to America when a large number of professional criminals were driven out of London by Robert Peel's metropolitan police.¹¹⁰ Consequently, by the 1850s, a sufficient amount of cant existed in the United States to accommodate a full-length study.

In the same year as Hotten issued his *Dictionary of Slang, Cant and Vulgar Words* in England, George W. Matsell published his *Vocabularum*, detailing the language of the mid-nineteenth century American underworld. During his time as Chief of Police of New York City, Matsell spent several years studying the language of criminals, 'believing that it would enable [him] to converse with them more at ease, and thus acquire a knowledge of their character, besides obtaining from them information that

¹⁰⁸ 'The Flash Language.' *The Ladies Repository* (Cincinnati: J.F. Wright and L. Swormstedt, (8) 1848) 315.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 316.

¹¹⁰ Mencken. *The American Language* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1937) 575-89.

would assist [him] in the position [he] occupied, and consequently be of great service to the public.’¹¹¹

Matsell’s *Vocabularum* is by far the most comprehensive record of American cant for the nineteenth century. The text begins with a short history of cant, in which Matsell identifies its source with the European Gypsy bands of the fourteenth century. The dictionary itself contains almost 2,000 terms and expressions, displayed in a simple glossary format. The dictionary is followed by a series of short commentaries, lists of words and dialogues, including ‘A Scene in London Flash-Panny.’ Matsell also includes an appendix of the informal lexis and technical jargon of several different social groups (identified in Britain during this period as *slang*), such as: ‘Technical Words and Phrases, Used by Billiard Players,’ ‘Brokers’ Technicalities in Brief,’ and ‘Technical Words and Phrases in general use by Pugilists.’ He also inserts a flash song. Matsell’s *Vocabularum* proved to be extremely popular and the 1859 publication was later reprinted as *The Secret Language of Crime: The Rogue’s Lexicon*.

At this point in the mid-nineteenth century, cant lexicography in the United States seems to have lost its vogue. There are several possible reasons for this. The Civil War of 1861-1865 and the subsequent social upheaval may have diminished public interest in cant and slang publications. The expansion of the Western Frontier during this period captured people’s attention, and the Californian Gold Rush also created a new object of interest. As a result, very little written material on cant was published until the early twentieth century.

Overview 1790 – 1904

The years 1790 – 1904 marked the establishment of cant in the United States. Because the United States did not have a rich canting tradition to draw upon in the late eighteenth century, their earliest recorded cant terminology was similar, if not

¹¹¹ G. Matsell. *The Secret Language of Crime: Vocabularum or The Rogue’s Lexicon. Containing as well a glossary of terms used by Gamblers, Billiard, Players, Stock Brokers and Pugilists* (1859). (Springfield IL: Templegate, 1997) 6.

identical, to the British variety; early works (for example, Smith (1791) and Tufts (1807)) make no real distinction between British and American cant. In keeping with British trends, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century cant in the United States is unequivocally referred to as *flash*, as in Smith, Tufts and *The Ladies Repository* (1848). An extension of this use is the term *The Flash Society* (Smith), referring to the clandestine criminal underworld (the members of which presumably spoke flash), and the term *flashmen* (Tufts), referring to criminals fluent in flash. Matsell (1859), however, uses both *flash* and *cant* to describe the vocabulary of his dictionary. The moral justification for the inclusion of flash was not always expressly stated, but was implicit in publications such as Smith's, as the glossary appeared as part of Mount's confession for his crimes, his knowledge of flash being damning evidence of his criminality.

Most of these early American glossaries were brief, with short or single synonym definitions, and were appended to a larger text. Flash songs (i.e. canting songs) also featured, and Smith included an oath that criminals recited to gain admittance to the Flash Society. One interesting aspect of these publications was the emphasis placed upon flash as a secret language, despite the fact that British publications of this period no longer had this emphasis. Possibly this is because by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Britain had a strong tradition of underworld lexicography, enjoyed by a large readership drawn from a wide range of social backgrounds, whereas in America, this tradition was very much *in statu nascendi*.

By the mid-nineteenth century, however, American flash had developed significantly; the terms and expressions were numerous enough to accommodate a dictionary, and an individual flavour had begun to emerge, as demonstrated in Matsell (1859). At this point, however, probably as a result of war and Frontier expansion, attention turned elsewhere and underworld language lost popularity until the early twentieth century.

Records of American Canting Language 1904 – 2000

The works discussed in this section are: Number 1500's *Life in Sing Sing* (1904); Herbert Yenne's 'Prison Lingo' (1927); Godfrey Irwin's *American Tramp and*

Underworld Slang (1931); Noel Ersine's *Underworld and Prison Slang* (1933); Donald Clemmer's *The Prison Community* (1940); Hyman E. Goldin's (et al.) *A Dictionary of Underworld Lingo* (1950); Joseph E. Ragen's and Charles Finston's *Inside the World's Toughest Prison* (1962); Rose Giallombardo's *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison* (1966); Bruce Jackson's *A Thief's Primer* (1969); David Maurer's *Language of the Underworld* (1981); Inez Cardozo-Freeman's *The Joint* (1984); William Bentley's and James Corbett's *Prison Slang: Words and Expressions Depicting Life Behind Bars* (1992); W. T. Beckner's 'Pulling Time in Appalachia: A Comparative Study of Prison Argot' (1994); and Jonathan Lighter's *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (1994 et seq.).

The early twentieth century saw a renewal of interest in criminals and the underworld. It was during this period that, as in Britain, dictionaries and glossaries were produced that focused upon the language of the prison as well as the free underworld. It is also interesting to note that, although much late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American underworld language drew upon British equivalents, the works published during the twentieth century tended to emphasise Americanisms, rather than British-derived terminology.

By this time, the terms *flash* and *cant* were no longer used to describe the language of the underworld. As in Britain, *slang* was established as the term for the transient, informal lexis used by a wide range of social groups. In the first half of the twentieth century there were unsuccessful attempts to categorise the language of the underworld as a subcategory of this rapidly evolving American slang. One attempt was to follow the British example and use the term *slang* as a wider context of origin, specifying 'thieves' slang,' 'convict slang,' 'prison slang,' etc. as appropriate. However, also in keeping with British practice, the terms *argot*, *jargon* and *lingo* were also used interchangeably and this practice continues even today.¹¹² To remain consistent, the term *argot* will be used when describing the language of prison or the underworld in these twentieth century works.

¹¹² Beckner, 47.

One work representative of this period in the development of American underworld lexicography is the 1904 publication, *Life in Sing Sing*. This was the first main work in the United States to concentrate specifically upon prison argot. The author served six-and-a-half years in Ossining Prison in New York¹¹³ and his real name is never revealed; he is known by the pseudonym Number 1500 (presumably his prison number) and is also referred to as 'Black' in the text. The author includes a chapter, 'Slang Among Convicts,' in which he treats the argot of prison inmates and the argot of thieves as a single entity. The chapter begins with a short preface where Number 1500 makes some general comments about the nature of argot in prisons, for example: that argot is more for decorative effect, rather than for secrecy, as the guards are also familiar with it, but that the possession and management of large vocabulary is something the inmate is very proud of as his one literary accomplishment; that words are easily assimilated into the prison vocabulary from many sources, therefore overlap is to be expected, but that some words are the distinctive possession of a certain type of criminal and are used in no other context; and that items of thieves' argot are passwords of the profession, and are the hailing and recognition signs in its membership.

The rest of the chapter is taken up with a 'Dictionary of Thieves' and Convicts' Slang,' which is the author's main contribution to American underworld lexicography. He includes a list of about 450 terms with brief definitions and explains that: 'I made up a list of these [terms] as they came to my notice, and it is perhaps the most complete dictionary of thieves' slang in active service that has ever been made.'¹¹⁴ To assert this is an exaggeration; his glossary is certainly not the most complete 'ever made' (even Grose's specialist dictionary contained almost 10 times the number of entries) but it is still a useful and comprehensive list.

The glossary is divided into two parts, listing single headwords in alphabetical order, followed by expressions. (This break is not indicated by any heading, so is easy to miss and may confuse users of the glossary.) The American influence is evident in many of these terms, for example, *pogie* = a county jail or workhouse, and *rap* = a complaint; charged with committing a crime; to prosecute. Despite this, aspects of old

¹¹³ 'Sing Sing' is the colloquial term for New York's Ossining Prison.

¹¹⁴ Number 1500 (pseud.). *Life in Sing Sing* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1904) 245.

British cant are still apparent, for example, the traditional *cove* = a fellow. The glossary is followed by 28 sample sentences and 6 paragraphs in argot, with translations. *Life in Sing Sing* allows an excellent insight into late nineteenth and early twentieth century prison life and language and is a key text in the development of underworld lexicography in the United States.

From the early twentieth century onwards, American underworld lexicography was bolstered by the output of scholarly studies of prison argot.¹¹⁵ One early study of this type is Herbert Yenne's 'Prison Lingo,' published in *American Speech* in 1927. This article is worthy of note because it was the first prison lexicon to be published in an American scholarly journal, and antedates the earliest of David Maurer's underworld language studies. Yenne's study adds little to the academic discussion of prison language, but he lists 100 terms (unalphabetised) with definitions, many of which are still current in one form or another.¹¹⁶

Godfrey Irwin's *American Tramp and Underworld Slang* was one of the major works to be published in the first half of the twentieth century. As Eric Partridge says himself, Irwin's 1931 dictionary was the best dictionary for American cant until his own 1949 publication.¹¹⁷ The publication of such full-length dictionaries was the main source of scholarly compilation and transmission of terminology during this period, greatly adding to the corpus of recorded American argot and thoroughly advancing the standards of underworld lexicography.

American Tramp and Underworld Slang is a very extensive work. It begins with an essay on 'American Tramp and Underworld Slang,' which describes the nature of the language and outlines its history. The dictionary itself, although in glossary format, provides full, informative definitions, with origins and basic etymologies. A number of tramp songs are also appended. The work finishes with an essay on 'The American

¹¹⁵ A considerable body of scholarly literature has accrued that concentrates specifically upon the language of the prison community in the United States. The majority of these studies take the form of brief journal articles with short glossaries appended. As such, they do not add much to this discussion, so I have decided to omit them. For a description of these various articles, see W. T. Beckner's PhD Dissertation, 'Pulling Time in Appalachia: A Comparative Study of Prison Argot,' which contains a very good literature review covering this material.

¹¹⁶ Beckner, 15.

¹¹⁷ Partridge. *Here, There and Everywhere*, 101.

Underworld and English Cant' by Eric Partridge, which takes a historical perspective, tracing the American underworld terminology of the early twentieth century back to its origins in English cant from 1530 to 1850. Significantly, the dictionary and its associated material demonstrate how American argot has evolved from a subsidiary branch of British cant to a variety in its own right.

Another important contributor to the development of underworld and prison lexicography was Noel Ersine, who composed *Underworld and Prison Slang* in 1933, the first full-length American dictionary based, in large part, on prison sources. Like Irwin's publication, Ersine's dictionary comprises a significant number of previously unrecorded terms and expressions, related to a variety of subject areas; for collecting underworld terms, Irwin and Ersine in the United States have been likened to B.E., Grose and Hotten in Britain.¹¹⁸

Ersine lists 1,500 headwords: none of these, apparently, were obsolete at the time of publication. As Ersine's target audience is not academics, but fiction writers, his definitions are brief, and he makes condescending remarks in his introduction about the speakers of prison argot, asserting that inmates use argot because they are not educated nor articulate enough to express themselves fluently in Standard English. This attitude, however, is not unlike criminological theories of Ersine's era; he is a product of his environment, and his work is a very useful contribution to this discourse.

Sociologists and criminologists have also had a key part to play in the development of underworld lexicography, despite the fact that they have not been professional lexicographers. These academics may not develop lexicographical conventions, but they add significantly to the corpus of recorded criminal argot. The first of such studies is Donald Clemmer's *The Prison Community* of 1940. Clemmer's book discusses his study of a 2,300-man major Midwestern prison (not identified) during the years 1931-1934, in which he attempts to describe the culture of the prison, and to ascertain the degree to which a culture determines the philosophy of its residents. One of Clemmer's hypotheses is that language is the primary medium through which a

¹¹⁸ Beckner, 22.

culture is transferred among its residents, and to support this view he includes a dictionary of 1,063 commonly-used terms gleaned from written autobiographies and direct conversations with inmates. This glossary, 'Prison Argot,' arranges the headwords according to subject category, providing part-of-speech labels for each headword and clear, useful definitions. Clemmer's book is valuable not only because of its compilation of new prison terminology, but because it increases our understanding of prison culture and the part that language has to play in the creation, transferral and maintenance of this culture. *The Prison Community* is one of the most significant sociological texts of the twentieth century and has become a foundation text for successive sociologists as well as a helpful resource for (underworld) lexicographers.

The middle years of the twentieth century saw a remarkable outpouring of quality underworld lexicography. Eric Partridge's hugely comprehensive *Dictionary of the Underworld* and Paul Tempest's innovative *Lag's Lexicon* were joined by their American counterpart, *A Dictionary of Underworld Lingo*, in 1950. Produced through the collaborative efforts of Hyman E. Goldin, Frank O'Leary and Morris Lipsius, this monumental work was written entirely within the walls of a major prison. In this work, the authors attempt a thorough compilation of the language of the underworld, making use of their own authentic underworld experience. To assist them with their task, the authors take advantage of the knowledge and experience of several other inmates, enlisting them as expert advisors. This 'Board of Underworld Advisers' contains people with fascinating pseudonyms such as: 'Bad Bill,' 'Big Department,' 'Bubbles,' 'Butch,' 'Chink,' 'Chop Chop,' 'Dippo,' 'Duke,' 'Hal the Rebel,' 'Iggy,' 'Jo Jo,' 'Red Mack,' 'Slim,' 'Stubs' and 'The Colonel,' who together draw from a huge variety of criminal backgrounds.

The dictionary itself contains 5,000 lexical items, believed (at the time) to be in nationwide usage. These terms cover a number of subject categories, describing different crimes, categories of inmate, and various underworld subcultures, including the drug scene. The format of the wordlist displays an advance in lexicographical technique, being arranged as a dictionary, as opposed to the glossary layout that characterised earlier publications. Headwords are listed alphabetically and definitions are clear and concise, with numbered senses and example sentences. Part-of-speech

labels are included to differentiate identical headwords, and the authors provide useful cross-references. The final section of the dictionary is in the form of a thesaurus that indexes and repeats the primary glossary, this time translating mainstream English headwords into underworld lexis. *A Dictionary of Underworld Lingo* makes an important contribution to the development of American underworld lexicography and has had an impact on subsequent lexicographers in this field.

Possibly following Clemmer's example, attaching glossaries to texts not otherwise concerned with language has become commonplace in the criminal justice arena.¹¹⁹ Many of these glossaries are short and are attached to brief journal articles; because of their size, the glossaries tend to appear in a very basic format and are of limited quality and lexical interest. One more comprehensive glossary, however, is appended to Joseph E. Ragen's and Charles Finston's work, *Inside the World's Toughest Prison*, which appeared in 1962. Ragen himself was a long-time warden of the Joliet-Statesville Prisons in Illinois, and his text is primarily concerned with the administration issues of a maximum-security prison. The 35-page 'Penitentiary and Underworld Glossary' comprises an extensive list of about 1,500 generic terms, albeit with very brief definitions and no introductory remarks. The words cover subject areas such as sex and sexuality, drugs, types of inmates and members of the criminal underworld, women, places and procedures within the prison, and authority figures.

Similarly, a glossary is attached to *Society of Women: A Study of a Women's Prison*, Rose Giallombardo's exploratory study of an adult prison for women. Published in 1966, this is the first and only American work to provide an in-depth analysis of the culture and language of female prison inmates. Giallombardo gathered data for her study between July 1962 and July 1963 at the Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women in West Virginia. Her purpose was to examine the prison community from a sociological perspective, that is, as a system of roles and functions, and to make comparisons with the literature of the male prison in order to increase understanding of the prison structure within its larger societal context.¹²⁰ Giallombardo's long-term observation of, and integration into, the prison community strongly resembles Clemmer's methodology. Giallombardo's 'Glossary of Prison Terms' contains 360

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, 31.

¹²⁰ Giallombardo, vii.

words and expressions, and in her introduction to the glossary, Giallombardo points out that:

The words and phrases ... may be looked upon as an inmate's working vocabulary. The meaning of these terms is generally known by the inmates. However, all these terms are not unique to the female prison; a few are also known in the male prison and in other subcultures.¹²¹

Although Giallombardo acknowledges that 'a few' terms are also known in male prisons, subsequent research has revealed that, despite the fact that the terms were gathered from the women and used commonly by them, almost none are restricted to female usage.¹²² Giallombardo's work is noteworthy nevertheless, as it is the first work to document the language of female criminals and to reflect the female prison experience.

Ragen's and Giallombardo's studies were followed later in the decade by Bruce Jackson's *A Thief's Primer* (1969). Again, the book itself is not principally concerned with language, being one of a series of books resulting from the author's studies of prison and criminal culture during the 1960s.¹²³ *A Thief's Primer* is composed of statements made by a moderately successful thief named Sam whom the author met in a Texas state prison. The final section of Jackson's introduction concerns a conversation with Sam about the nature and function of prison argot, which acts as a detached preface to the glossary. The glossary comprises only 101 terms and expressions but, although Jackson lists significantly fewer terms than Ragen and Giallombardo, his definitions are much fuller; Jackson includes background information, example sentences (quoted mainly from Sam) and cross-references. Although, in its entirety, this text is of minor lexical interest, it nevertheless constitutes an intriguing view of 1960s prison language and culture.

Another work worthy of note is David Maurer's *Language of the Underworld*, published in 1981. During his career, Maurer made a huge contribution to the understanding of American argot, assisting professionals in the areas of law enforcement, psychology and social work, as well as lexicography. Maurer pioneered

¹²¹ *ibid.*, 200.

¹²² Beckner, 31.

¹²³ B. Jackson. *A Thief's Primer* (London: Macmillan, 1969) 9.

new methodologies and undertook extensive fieldwork, gathering information from a number of criminal and quasicriminal sources.

Maurer is known for his many scholarly writings on the subject of slang and underworld languages, and his *Language of the Underworld* is a compilation of articles written for linguistic, social science, and sociological journals between 1930 and 1973. Maurer provides a very extensive account of the language of about 20 different social groups connected with the underworld. Each group is dealt with separately, and rather than providing one amalgamated glossary, Maurer appends an appropriate list of terms and expressions at the end of each article. Two articles, 'The Lingo of the Good People' (old-time criminals) and 'The Lingo of the Jug-Heavy' (safe-crackers) are the most prison-specific, based on material collected from Ohio State Penitentiary over a period of nine months.¹²⁴ *Language of the Underworld* is a robust work in terms of its lexical analysis of underworld subcultures and showcases Maurer's forty-year contribution to American underworld lexicography.

Inez Cardozo-Freeman's 1984 book, *The Joint: Language and Culture in a Maximum Security Prison*, is what W. T. Beckner describes as 'unquestionably the most important scholarly inquiry into the language of American prisons.'¹²⁵ Developed in collaboration with prison inmate Eugene P. Delorme, *The Joint* is a folk-ethnography of life inside the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla, drawn from 152 hours of taped interviews and conversations with inmates collected over a 30 month period from 1978 to 1980.

The work largely comprises first-person narratives from the inmates at Walla Walla, offering an extensive description of prison culture as seen through the eyes of the inmates. Of greatest interest here is the glossary of prison argot included later in the work. The terms listed here are made up of a mixture of underworld professional jargon, imported street slang and terms unique to institutional life. Although the lexicographical conventions are simple (no part-of-speech labels or etymologies), Cardozo-Freeman provides full, illustrative definitions for her headwords. One interesting innovation is the comparison between her list of argot and an earlier list

¹²⁴ Green. *Chasing the Sun*, 432.

¹²⁵ Beckner, 43.

collected at the same institution from 1954 to 1958 by one Robert A. Freeman. This comparison reveals several differences. Cardozo-Freeman notes the parallels between these differences and comments upon the cultural evolution in any folk community that gives rise to alterations in its language. One specific point of interest in the glossary is the occurrence of a number of rhyming slang terms, such as: *Charlie rousers* = trousers, *Hank and Frank* = bank, *Jack Mohoffey* = coffee, *royal d'amour* = floor, and several others, as rhyming slang is not a salient feature of American prison argot.¹²⁶ From a more general lexicographical point of view, this particular study is fascinating because it clearly shows the development of American prison argot (albeit in one specific place) over a generation.

There are, however, problems with Cardozo-Freeman's lexicographical presentation and analysis; for example, although her glossary cites appearances of terms included in several other slang/argot dictionaries such as Farmer's *Dictionary of Slang and its Analogues*, Partridge's *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, Maurer's *Language of the Underworld* and the *Lexicon Balatronicum* of 1811, she does not cite all of the terms from the 1950s collection at Walla Walla nor the complete list of terms collected during her current study, which is peculiar, and would appear to compromise her argument. In addition to this, many terms listed in the text are not included in the glossary. No reasons are given for this arbitrary selection of material. Despite these lapses, however, *The Joint* is an extremely ambitious work and offers a major contribution to the literature of prison language studies.

A good basic dictionary of prison language is *Prison Slang: Words and Expressions Depicting Life Behind Bars*, compiled by William Bentley and James Corbett and published in 1992. Bentley and Corbett gathered the material for the dictionary while they were serving prison sentences together, continuing the tradition of ex-inmates as some of the key producers of prison glossaries and dictionaries. The dictionary itself is not alphabetised, but arranged according to subject category, much like the early British canting dictionaries. Some of these subject areas are to do with prison policy and procedure, such as: Institutionalisation, Sentencing, Serving Time, Parole and

¹²⁶ Julian Franklyn writes that rhyming slang came to the United States in the early twentieth century via Australia, where it had originally been brought from Britain by transported convicts. For several years, rhyming slang in the United States was known as 'Australian slang.'

Records, and Inmates; whereas other areas deal more personally with inmate life, listing terms to do with: Sexuality, Cigarettes and Food, Drugs and Alcohol, and Tattoos. An index provides an alphabetical listing of all these words.

Altogether, over 1,100 separate words and expressions are listed in the dictionary. These are set out in simple glossary format, but the authors' definitions are usually quite extensive, including illustrative sentences, usage notes and anecdotes from prison life. The authors also attempt etymologies, but here it seems that Bentley and Corbett have been somewhat superficial in their research, looking only to recent sources and within the modern prison for the origins of their terms. Consequently, they do not trace some terms back to earlier derivations and have a tendency to stray into folk etymology. For example, here is one entry:

Shiv a knife or any sharpened object used as a knife.

The term shiv originated many years ago when the only metal readily available to prisoners was metal spacers or shivs. These spacers were used in cell door hinges to make the cell doors fit properly when closed or to level the metal bunks in the cells. These spacers were obtained by the inmates, sharpened and used as knives [sic].¹²⁷

In this sense, the term *shiv* actually dates from the late nineteenth century in the United States, in the form *shive* from the early to mid-nineteenth century, and as *chive* from the late eighteenth century (listed in Smith's glossary of 1791), well before the days of the modern penitentiary. All are derivations of the Romany *chib* or *chiv* = a blade, dating back to the sixteenth century and earlier. The verbal form *chive* = to stab also dates from this early period. The term has been Anglicised for several hundred years: B.E. (c.1698) cites *chive* as cant = a knife, and the first edition of Grose's dictionary (1785) lists: 'CHIVE, or CHIFE, knife, file or saw; to chive the darbies, to file off the irons or fetters; to chive the bouns of the frows, to cut off women's pockets.' This basic information could have been discovered by consulting obvious and easily accessible sources (even in prison) such as Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld* or prominent earlier dictionaries.

Regardless of these minor errors, *Prison Slang* lists many previously unrecorded terms and takes a fresh look at existing material. As such, it is an interesting and engaging work, and a helpful resource for American prison and underworld lexicographers.

¹²⁷ W. Bentley and J. Corbett. *Prison Slang* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1992) 88.

One recent substantial study of prison language is Walton Thomas Beckner's dissertation, 'Pulling Time in Appalachia: A Comparative Study of Prison Argot,' undertaken for his PhD degree from the University of Tennessee, and completed in 1994. Beckner worked as a chaplain with prisoners in a statewide correctional system before beginning his degree. The dissertation reports on data gathered from inmates in a four-state Appalachian region. Beckner interviewed in four prisons, one in each state: Eastern Kentucky Correctional Complex (Kentucky), Craggy Correctional Center (North Carolina), Northeast Correctional Center (Tennessee) and West Virginia Penitentiary (West Virginia). Using an interview guide he designed to evoke argot surrounding prison cultural concerns, he interviewed 26 inmates who had served protracted sentences in these states.

The dissertation provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the prison language gathered, but it is Beckner's glossary of argot terms that is most significant in this discussion. Beckner lists 1,030 entries covering 1,216 argot terms, with each term coded with the name of the state where it was heard. Unlike Cardozo-Freeman's glossary, Beckner's list makes virtually no mention of rhyming slang terminology. Beckner admits the problem of compiling a unique prison lexicon because some terms, especially those to do with drugs, are also common in street usage. He states that, 'The object of this study, however, is to determine which terms have currency within prisons, not which are found only there, and some overlap is to be expected.'¹²⁸ In line with this, Beckner cites some street slang terms, such as *roach* = half of a joint (marijuana cigarette), but also includes some very general terminology which seems unnecessary, such as *cell*, defined as '[a] separate room used as living quarters for one or more inmates.' Example sentences are also included, although in some cases the example sentences do not actually include the headword. The lexicon makes no attempt to trace origins or first recorded dates for these argot terms, and no literary citations are included as exemplifications.

One very useful component of the work is Beckner's valuable and comprehensive review of past scholarly work done on American prison language, in which he covers

¹²⁸ Beckner, 73-74.

many of the smaller articles on prison lexis that have not been admitted to this current discussion. The importance of 'Pulling Time in Appalachia' is that it is the first study of American prison language to ask certain critical questions of informants in order to generate data descriptive of the informant's culture, which is necessary in gathering an accurate and comprehensive lexicon of the language of any given group. It is also the first such study to look inter-state, as previous studies of this type focused only upon a single prison or state. Beckner's work is scholarly and well-researched, and offers a fascinating insight into American prison argot at the end of the twentieth century.

The most recent publication to incorporate American argot is the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, edited by Jonathan Lighter. The first volume of the dictionary (A-G) was released in 1994, followed by a second volume (H-O) in 1997. The third volume is due to be released early in the twenty-first century. Described as 'both an irreverent glossary of our daily speech and an erudite index of our language's cultural evolution,'¹²⁹ the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* is the most comprehensive dictionary of American slang yet produced. Based on historical principles, it spans three hundred years of slang use in America, covering both current and obsolete words and expressions, and noting their origins. Although the dictionary covers all kinds of slang, drawing upon a huge range of sources, underworld and prison argot feature significantly. The *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang* is a valuable resource for linguists, translators, sociologists and journalists as well as lexicographers, and heralds a new era of American canting lexicography.

Overview 1904 – 2000

There were several trends and developments in American underworld lexicography in the period 1904 – 2000. The terms *flash* and *cant* were no longer used to describe the language of criminals after the nineteenth century; instead, the terms *argot*, *lingo*, *slang* and *jargon* were used interchangeably throughout the twentieth century. Rather

¹²⁹ Michiko Kakutani. Review of the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*. *New York Times*, July 1997.

than drawing upon British argot, the works of this period placed a large emphasis upon Americanisms, and this American argot evolved during the century until it influenced British argot to a large degree. The chief trend of the twentieth century was the prison-oriented study describing the argot of prison inmates, as with Number 1500 (1904), Yenne (1927), Ersine (1933) and Clemmer (1940), with an increase in these studies after World War Two due, as in Britain, to the growth of the prison system and the development of the social sciences, as with Goldin et al. (1950), Ragen and Finston (1962), Giallombardo (1966), Jackson (1969), Cardozo-Freeman (1984), Bentley and Corbett (1992), and Beckner (1994).

The earlier part of the century was also characterised by scholarly, authoritative, full-length publications that focused on the free underworld as well as the prison, as seen in Irwin (1931), Ersine (1933) and Partridge (1937, 1949). Because the influence of the social sciences upon underworld lexicography was strongly apparent in the United States during the later part of the century (perhaps more so than in Britain), many new terms and expressions were recorded in glossaries appended to larger sociological, criminological and folk-ethnographical texts not primarily concerned with language, as in Clemmer, Ragen and Finston, Giallombardo, and Cardozo-Freeman. Other similar studies were undertaken by sociolinguists such as Maurer (1981) and Beckner. Inmates also played a key part in the compilation of prison terminology, as seen with Goldin, and Bentley and Corbett. Because most of these glossaries and dictionaries were not produced by professional lexicographers but by people from a variety of social and educational backgrounds, located in many different areas of a vast country, plagiarism did not occur to a large degree. Some of the larger works, such as those by Partridge and Cardozo-Freeman, naturally drew upon previous sources; however, inmates did not always have access to a range of lexicographical material and tended to speak from their own experience, and sociologists and criminologists were more interested in interviewing their chosen subjects and presenting the results of their own research, rather than borrowing another's material to make their own glossaries appear more comprehensive.

A further result of the modern scholarship that informed American underworld lexicography was a marked improvement in prefatory material. This became much more sophisticated, involving accurate and insightful discussions of the historical

development of slang and argot, as seen particularly in Maurer and Beckner. The twentieth century also saw an expansion in the semantic categories for argot terms and expressions to describe new classes of criminals, new crimes, and features of the modern prison. As part of this, the culture and vocabulary of female prison inmates was described for the first time. As in Britain, drug terminology featured prominently. Interestingly, rhyming slang terminology occurred regularly in some studies, such as Cardozo-Freeman's, but hardly at all in other studies, such as Beckner's.

The most recent studies of argot in the United States included a review of past literature on the subject (Beckner 1994), or recorded the evolution of informal and underworld lexis (Lighter 1994 et seq.). This is significant, as it indicates that by the mid-1990s, underworld lexicography in America had developed to the extent where scholars could finally look back and summarise a tradition.

AUSTRALIA

Records of Australian Canting Language 1812 – 1900

The works discussed in this section are: James Hardy Vaux's *Vocabulary of the Flash Language* (1812) and *Memoirs* (1819); Mellish's 'A Convict's Recollections of New South Wales' (1825); the *Sydney Slang Dictionary* (c.1882); and Cornelius Crowe's *Australian Slang Dictionary* (1895).

Cant first travelled to Australia from Britain with the transported convicts during the late eighteenth century, but did not acquire an indigenous flavour until the 1820s,¹³⁰ and it was not until about 1870 that the British element ceased to be dominant. Most of the 80,000 convicts transported to New South Wales arrived between 1814 and 1840 to find a compact, strongly organised society in which their criminal class greatly outnumbered the rest of the citizens. Most of the convicts were male and their familiar place was London, where the majority of them were tried for their crimes.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Partridge. *Here, There and Everywhere*, 99.

¹³¹ R. Langker. *The Vocabulary of Convictism in New South Wales 1788-1850* (Sydney: University of Sydney Australian Language Research Centre, December 1981) 1-2.

The first descriptions of Australian underworld language refer, unsurprisingly, to the London *flash* spoken by these convicts, which eventually became infused with new terms relating to life in the Australian convict settlement.

The first antipodean underworld lexicographer was James Hardy Vaux, a notorious pickpocket and swindler from London who was transported to Australia on three separate occasions. Vaux wrote his *Memoirs* and his *Vocabulary of the Flash Language* while serving a life sentence in New South Wales. Although the book first appeared in London, it describes Vaux's life in the Australian penal settlement under Governors King and Macquarie. The *Memoirs* are the first piece of full-length autobiography to have been written in Australia, and the *Vocabulary of the Flash Language* is the first cant glossary to have been produced there; indeed, the *Vocabulary* is the first Australian dictionary.¹³²

It is widely accepted that the *Vocabulary* dates from earlier than the *Memoirs*.¹³³ Although the two works were published as a single volume in 1819, the dedication indicates that Vaux compiled the glossary in early 1812. At this time, Vaux was undergoing hard labour in Newcastle as punishment for a string of thefts. Noel McLachlan notes that, although the *Vocabulary* appeared as a glossary to the *Memoirs*, it seems to have been prepared for publication separately. An anonymous note at the beginning of the *Vocabulary* attempts to justify its physical connection with the *Memoirs*, and occasional footnotes in the *Memoirs* refer the reader to the 'Cant Dictionary' for an explanation of certain terms. However, this labelling is largely redundant, as the *Memoirs* are already self-contained in this respect. Vaux provided his own footnotes with definitions of the flash terminology used commonly throughout the text. One page contains 13 such definitions, and Vaux expressly states that these explanations are to aid readers who are without a cant dictionary.

[D]uring this our limited career, we exercised alternately the following numerous modes of depredation; which lest the reader should be unprovided with a cant dictionary, I shall briefly explain in succession: viz., buzzing (1), dragging (2), sneaking (3), hoisting (4), pinching (5), smashing (6), jumping (7), spanking (8), and starrng (9); together with the kid-rig (10), the letter-racket (11), the order-racket (12), and the snuff-racket (13).¹³⁴

¹³² N. McLachlan in the introduction to *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux* (1819). (London: Heinemann, 1964) xv.

¹³³ See, for example, McLachlan (1964), Horndage (1980), Simes (1993), and Green (1996).

¹³⁴ J. H. Vaux. *The Memoirs of James Hardy Vaux* (1819). (London: Heinemann, 1964) 82.

There is also internal evidence that the *Vocabulary* was compiled earlier; when one compares the terms in Vaux's glossary with dates in other sources, one finds that by the time of publication, many of Vaux's terms were out of date.¹³⁵

The *Vocabulary* itself is elegantly written, containing about 740 terms. Naturally, it is almost wholly concerned with the flash language of London, but significantly, Vaux includes some Australian flash terms which are not included in similar British dictionaries of the period such as Grose's *Vulgar Tongue* and the *Lexicon Balatronicum*, for example: *lag ship* = a transport chartered by Government for the conveyance of convicts to New South Wales; and *old lag* = a man or woman who has been transported. Vaux contributes many new terms to the corpus of recorded underworld terminology, providing full definitions with examples and anecdotes. One interesting habit of Vaux's is to define his headwords using further flash terminology. He does, however, place in italics any flash terms incorporated in the definition, as he explains:

Note. The Author has found it necessary to introduce frequently, in the course of his definitions, technical, or cant words and phrases. This he could not avoid without much tautology and unpleasing circumlocution. The Reader will therefore take notice, that all such cant terms are placed in Italics; and where at a loss to comprehend them, he has only to refer to their alphabetical position for an explanation.¹³⁶

It is interesting to note that Vaux appears to use the terms *cant* and *flash* interchangeably, which strengthens the argument that, at this time, the terms were treated synonymously. Both Vaux's *Memoirs* and his *Vocabulary* are amusing and captivating; his wit, fluency and lexicographical skill mean that his work makes an important contribution not only to Australian underworld literature, but to Australian culture and history.

A minor contributor to the development of Australian cant lexicography was an ex-convict known only by the name of Mellish. Mellish published a 19-page article entitled, 'A Convict's Recollections of New South Wales. Written by Himself' in *The London Magazine* of May 1825. The editor's note at the beginning of the piece explains that Mellish had been transported to Australia and, shortly after returning,

¹³⁵ McLachlan, xvi.

¹³⁶ Vaux, 221.

had been 'committed to the gaol of one of the midland counties'¹³⁷ where he set down his memories of his experiences in the penal colony for the amusement of the gaoler's wife. The manuscript, originally inscribed *Mellish's Book of Botany Bay*, is set in about 1814 and describes the convicts' voyage out to Australia, their reception at the penal colony and their daily routine. Mellish also provides descriptions of female convicts, Aborigines, and Australian flora and fauna. Like Vaux, Mellish was a speaker of flash and, as the magazine reprints Mellish's manuscript verbatim, the article contains many flash terms and is an excellent source for vocabulary and phonetic spellings. Unfortunately, Mellish's article terminates abruptly in mid-sentence, leaving readers to speculate about the remainder of his contribution.

At this point in the nineteenth century, as in the United States, cant publications ceased for a period of about 50 years. There were a number of contributing factors. By the 1830s, the convict population no longer outnumbered the civilian population in Australia. Transportation was stopped in New South Wales in 1840, Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1852 and in Western Australia in 1867,¹³⁸ which meant that convicts ceased to be a contemporary issue and no longer held the same public interest. During this period, Australia was developing its nationhood and did not wish to be branded as a convict settlement; therefore, publications detailing the language of Australian convicts were discouraged. In England, Australia was being actively marketed as a British colonial settlement, and any material drawing attention to Australia's recent convict history would have been 'bad press.' This impacted upon the publication of Australian cant material because, for the first part of the nineteenth century, such works had been published mainly in England. A generation later, however, the development of Australian national identity was marked by self-conscious attempts to distinguish Australian culture from the parent British culture, with a view to creating an 'empire within an empire.'¹³⁹ One result of this process of individuation was a renewed interest in the language of the Australian underworld, coupled with an increase in the amount of uniquely Australian cant terminology.

¹³⁷ Editor's Note to Mellish. 'A Convict's Recollection of New South Wales. Written by Himself.' *The London Magazine* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, Volume 2, May 1825) 49.

¹³⁸ B. Ralph Lewis, 3703.

¹³⁹ F. Crowley. *A New History of Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia Pty. Ltd., 1974) 124.

Later in the nineteenth century Australia witnessed two substantial publications: the anonymous *Sydney Slang Dictionary* of c.1882 and Cornelius Crowe's *Australian Slang Dictionary* of 1895. The author of *The Sydney Slang Dictionary* describes his work as 'The Detectives' Handbook,' due to the large amount of 'Low Life and Flash Slang' that it contains. Gary Simes points out that the dictionary includes some specifically English terminology; however, the work still provides an interesting view of late nineteenth century underworld language in Australia. Interestingly, *flash* was used in Australia to describe the language of the criminal underworld until the end of the nineteenth century, despite the fact that in Britain and the United States the term had dropped out of use by the mid-nineteenth century.

Crowe's *Australian Slang Dictionary* also includes a considerable amount of underworld terminology, particularly 'the Words and Phrases of the Thieving Fraternity.' Crowe himself was a Melbourne policeman, and in the preface to his lexicon he reiterates the argument of compiling a dictionary for the sake of public morality and to frustrate the efforts of criminals. He explains that:

My aim in compiling this small Dictionary is to place in the hands of the public a work through which they may become conversant with the slang terms used by the rogue fraternity as a medium of communication with each other.... I trust the circulation of this work will have the desired effect of preventing criminals, rogues and gamblers from conversing with impunity in the presence of police and the public.¹⁴⁰

The dictionary itself runs to about 100 pages of text and incorporates several hundred terms and expressions set out in simple glossary format. Although Crowe deals with the slang of 33 different social groups, he includes a wide coverage of criminal argot used in Australia, focusing upon the language of burglars, impostors, rogues, thieves and vagrants. Crowe does ignore some genuine Australian terminology¹⁴¹ and much of the slang/argot listed in the dictionary is also traceable elsewhere; however, Crowe is aware of the degree to which outside influences are involved in the evolution of the language of the Australian underworld, as he writes:

Although I have entitled this book the 'AUSTRALIAN SLANG DICTIONARY,' I would ask the reader to bear in mind that but few of the terms it contains have been invented by Australian criminals; the most of them have been brought into use by the criminal classes who have emigrated here from different parts of the world where criminals have had almost a language of their own for centuries past.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ C. Crowe. *The Australian Slang Dictionary* (Fitzroy: Robert Barr, 1895) Preface.

¹⁴¹ G. Simes. *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993) xlvi.

¹⁴² C. Crowe, Preface.

Crowe concludes his intriguing work with a brief commentary on back slang and rhyming slang and some canting songs.

Overview 1812 – 1900

As in the United States, the nineteenth century was a period of establishment for Australian underworld lexicography. The years 1812 – 1900 saw many developments in this field that were contemporaneous with similar developments in the United States. In line with the fashion of the day, early Australian underworld language was generally referred to as *flash* (although Vaux (1812, 1819) seems to use *flash* and *cant* synonymously). Like in Britain and the United States, *slang* was seen as a broader lexical category of which underworld language was one aspect, for example, the anonymous 1882 *Sydney Slang Dictionary* advertised that it contained *flash slang*. Originally spoken by transported convicts, this flash was based strongly upon the flash of London, as seen in Vaux and in Mellish (1825). In these early publications, little differentiation was made between the British and Australian varieties; however, as the century progressed, Australian flash slowly acquired indigenous features as Australian national identity developed and asserted its difference from England.

Unsurprisingly, it was convicts who were the first underworld lexicographers. Their early records took the form of glossaries appended to longer texts (Vaux), or of scattered flash terminology embedded within a larger text (Vaux, Mellish). Like early American records, these Australian publications were autobiographical and, although the publications discussed the criminal underworlds of London and the Australian penal settlement from a personal point of view, they did not give a general commentary upon the people and practices of the underworld as earlier British works had tended to do. Because of this, the reason for the inclusion of flash terminology was largely to add ‘flavour’ to the autobiography, therefore lexicological and metalinguistic information was omitted.

The full-length dictionaries of the late nineteenth century were more comprehensive; Crowe (1895), for example, provided canting songs and a commentary upon back

slang and rhyming slang, as well as listing terms and expressions. Nevertheless, the dictionaries were still inconsistent in places and dealt with the slang of many other social groups in Australia as well as the criminal underworld. It is interesting to note that the moral ambivalence towards underworld language was also demonstrated by Australian underworld lexicographers: the author of the 1882 dictionary chose to remain anonymous, Vaux wrote that he compiled his *Memoirs and Vocabulary* to deter as well as to entertain, and Crowe wrote that his material was published for the sake of public morality and to make it difficult for criminals to communicate without being understood.

Records of Australian Canting Language 1900 – 2000

The works discussed in this section are: Sidney J. Baker's *A Dictionary of Australian Slang* (1941) and *The Australian Language* (1945); a prison glossary printed in *The Australasian Post* (1960); Jim McNeil's *The Chocolate Frog* (1971) and *The Old Familiar Juice* (1972); Neil James' 'Nodding the Nut for a Swy and One' (1975); Bill Horndage's *The Australian Slang* (1980); Robert Langker's *Flash in New South Wales 1788-1850* (1980) and *The Vocabulary of Convictism in New South Wales 1788-1850* (1981); W. S. Ransom's *Australian National Dictionary* (1988); and Gary Simes' *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* (1993).

Evidence for the use of Australian argot in the early twentieth century is very spasmodic; rarely does anything appear in print. The first published discussion of the language of the Australian underworld occurs in Sidney J. Baker's *A Dictionary of Australian Slang* of 1941. Although Baker's work is largely a dictionary devoted to general Australian slang, he lists various prison and underworld terms such as: *cop-busy* = a thief handing over plunder to a confederate to escape the law; *japanned* = said of a thief converted by a gaol chaplain; *Kath* = an indeterminate gaol sentence; *Kathleen Maroon* = a three year's [sic] gaol sentence; *Kathleen Mavourneen* (*Mavoureen*) = an habitual criminal; and *tickle a peter* = to rob a till. Although this work records a comprehensive number of Australian slang terms, the work is not 'scholarly,' in the sense that it is designed for a popular, mainstream audience rather than for academics. As such, the lexicographical conventions are simple; the terms are

displayed in a glossary format, with brief definitions and no part-of-speech labels. There are also some small errors; for example, although Baker states in his foreword that, 'As far as possible I have weeded out all English and American slang. I offer the native product – terse, apt and often colourful,'¹⁴³ he presents the term *ice-box* = a solitary prison cell. This term appears in other underworld dictionaries (e.g. Partridge's) as an American term recorded 10 years previously in 1931. Nevertheless, Baker's dictionary is interesting and entertaining, and offers the initial view of colloquial language in twentieth century Australia.

Baker went on to produce a much more substantial publication in 1945. Entitled *The Australian Language*, this comprehensive study describes the language of most subgroups of Australian society, including convicts, bushrangers, squatters, goldminers, vagrants, criminals, members of the armed forces, urban and rural citizens, school-children and teenagers, Aborigines, and speakers of pidgin languages in Australia and in neighbouring countries. Of relevance to this discussion is Baker's section on 'Convicts' and his chapter on 'The Underworld,' comprising sections on 'Criminals,' 'Jail' and 'General Cant.' Baker discusses the nature and origins of a large number of words and expressions dating from Vaux to the 1940s and provides short glossaries of general cant and prison argot. (In subsequent editions of this text, he incorporates a fragment of a prison glossary by an author known only as 'Thirty Five,' which will be discussed later.) Although these glossaries are brief and simple they are extremely useful (Baker was the source for most of the Australian argot contained in Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld*) and his significance in the development of Australian underworld lexicography cannot be denied.

A short record of then current prison argot appeared in an issue of the *Australasian Post* in 1960, contributed by a former prisoner at Long Bay, the main men's prison in Sydney. The unalphabetised list comprises 27 terms and expressions, about half of which are rhyming slang, evidence of the British tradition still strongly apparent in Australian underworld terminology, for example: *St. Louis Blues* = shoes; *Fred Astaire* = lair (a flashy, extrovert person); *Tom Thumb* = the drum (a useful tip; sound

¹⁴³ S. J. Baker. *A Dictionary of Australian Slang* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1941) 3.

advice, vital information); and *John Dory* = a crim's story.¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that a majority of these rhyming slang terms do not have mainstream English equivalents, but rhyme with another slang or argot term.

Australian rhyming slang is also evident in later prison-related texts. In 1973 Jim McNeil published two plays, *The Chocolate Frog* (first performed in 1971) and *The Old Familiar Juice* (first performed in 1972). McNeil was not a lexicographer, but a playwright and an inmate at Parramatta Prison, then a maximum-security prison for long-term offenders. Significantly, the title of McNeil's first play is a prison rhyming slang expression, as he explains:

In prison jargon, a 'chocolate frog' denotes a dog. And a dog is one whose conduct violates, or has violated in times past the informal 'laws' of prison society. A dog in prison is a criminal in the sight of those termed criminal themselves by ordinary society. And a dog should be judged, has to be punished, deserves to be ostracised and deprived – as criminals are.¹⁴⁵

McNeil draws upon his prison experience and uses prison argot together with other Australian colloquialisms almost constantly in the main text to lend atmosphere and authenticity to his play, as seen in this typical passage:

TOSSER: ... Trouble is, but, yer never know these days just who is a bloody chocolate, and who ain't! Yer see blokes is supposed to be good fellers, talkin' ter maggots who yer *know* are bloody tail-waggers. Only yesterday, I seen Eddie Thompson talkin' ter that weak bludger Brown ... yer remember him? He used ter be a lagger at Gosford years ago.
SHIRKER: Course I remember the maggot. I was gonna flog 'im once, when he lagged us for –
TOSSER: That's him, yeah. Well, I says to Eddie Thompson, 'What d'yer want go talkin' to that germ for?'¹⁴⁶

McNeil also appends a glossary of prison argot to the plays. Although the glossary is short, containing approximately 150 terms and expressions, it makes a relevant contribution to our knowledge and understanding of Australian underworld language, as it is one of the most up-to-date Australian prison lexicons available. Some of the terms are not directly prison argot, relating to dates or places relevant in the texts, such as Anzac Day, Erskineville and Gosford, but the majority are genuine. As expected, rhyming slang terminology appears in the glossary, but what is interesting is that, despite the imported formula, many terms possess a distinct Australian flavour, for example: *AIF* = deaf (from Australian Imperial Force); *Charlie Wheeler* = sheila;

¹⁴⁴ B. Horndage. *The Australian Slangue* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia Limited, 1980) 81-82.

¹⁴⁵ J. McNeil. *The Chocolate Frog and The Old Familiar Juice* (Sydney: Currency Methuen Drama Pty. Ltd., 1973) 10.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 18.

and *cock sparrer* = mad (from colloquial 'yarra; Yarra Bend was the name of an early Australian lunatic asylum).

During this period, it was current and ex-prison inmates, rather than professional sociolinguists or lexicographers, who were responsible for the bulk of the recording and discussion of underworld and prison language. In April 1975, the *Sydney Bulletin* published an article on prison argot written by Neil James, an Australian criminal who had spent 30 years of his life in prison. In the article, entitled 'Nodding the Nut for a Swy and One,'¹⁴⁷ James dryly describes his subject matter as: 'a unique and esoteric language understood only by thieves, prisoners, schizophrenics and acid heads.'¹⁴⁸ James discusses various terms and constructs a number of imaginary conversations between inmates to illustrate the originality and 'otherness' of prison argot.

Bill Horndage's 1980 publication, *The Australian Slanguage*, is a more extensive work, which, like Baker's *Australian Language*, deals with the slang of many of Australia's social groups. Horndage includes an eight-page section on 'The Convict Strain' of Australian slang, which begins with lengthy quotations from Partridge and Baker on the rise of Australian slang and the part that the convicts played in this. Horndage does not present his own argot lexicon, nor does he discuss previously unrecorded contemporary criminal terminology; instead, the remainder of the chapter is taken up with a brief history of previous studies of Australian argot. In the history, Horndage refers to Vaux, Neil James and the 1960 contributor to the *Australasian Post* amongst others, providing examples from these texts. In this chapter, Horndage gives a useful account of argot in Australia, but is aware of the brevity of his discussion and the lack of information on Australian argot, especially prison-specific terminology, as he writes: 'The mysteries of prison jargon are outside the scope of this work, but a few examples will give an idea of its complexity and perhaps may spur some student to explore this much neglected linguistic field.'¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ To *nod the nut* is to plead guilty, and a *swy and one* is a two-year prison sentence, with a minimum of one year to be served, depending on how the parole board assesses the inmate's case at the end of that year.

¹⁴⁸ Horndage, 80.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 81.

Subsequent lexicographers have taken note of Horndage's suggestion to 'explore this much neglected linguistic field,' but even today, no information on current argot exists, as the latest investigations have taken a retrospective view, rather than choosing to deal with contemporary lexis. Two interesting works of this type are those produced by Robert Langker: *Flash in New South Wales 1788-1850*, issued in September 1980, and *The Vocabulary of Convictism in New South Wales 1788-1850* issued in December 1981. These short works take the form of Occasional Papers of the University of Sydney Australian Language Research Centre, designed to record a 'work in progress' by members of the Centre, and constitute part of the research towards Langker's Master's Degree.

Both works look back to the earliest records of criminal argot in Australia. The first work, *Flash in New South Wales 1788-1850*, records the language used by transported convicts, much of which, as Vaux indicates, was the same as that used in London. The first part of the work includes a brief history of cant; a discussion of the characteristics of, and attitudes to, flash in New South Wales in the period described; and a review of literature incorporating flash into the later nineteenth century. The majority of the work comprises a dictionary of 60 flash terms used in Australia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Langker displays a high level of lexicographical skill: each term is meticulously catalogued, including details of its earliest and latest citations, a statement on its present currency, and abbreviations of the titles of authoritative dictionaries containing a mention of the term. Langker also includes a very comprehensive and useful bibliography of primary and secondary sources related to the topic.

The second work, *The Vocabulary of Convictism in New South Wales 1788-1850* is similar to the first, with a major lexicographical component, but the focus here is upon those terms directly associated with transportation, the convicts themselves, and the policy, procedures and day-to-day running of the penal settlement. The paper begins with a history of convictism in New South Wales, giving statistical details of the convicts and describing the transportation process and conditions in the settlement. Once more, Langker provides a very detailed lexicon, slightly longer than in the previous work, containing full definitions, examples, literary citations and cross-references. He concludes with another complete bibliography of primary and

secondary sources. Langker's main contribution to Australian cant lexicography in these works is his compilation of a list of lexical items from several disparate and obscure sources, giving an insight into the language of Australia's earliest European inhabitants, and through this, an insight into the social foundation of that country.

The *Australian National Dictionary (AND)*, edited by W. S. Ransom and published in 1988, is a very useful resource. Although it is concerned with all aspects of Australian language, it comprises the largest list of Australian argot to date, as it incorporates almost all the material published in previous prison glossaries and slang dictionaries. Because the dictionary is based on historical principles and lists only those terms already recorded in print, it necessarily takes a retrospective view of Australian argot, tracing its course over the past 200 years. The dictionary also gives further information about the origin of each term, charting its evolution and range of use. Despite the fact that the dictionary does not add any new argot terminology, it adds to our knowledge of existing terms and is a welcome addition to this history.

Gary Simes' *A Dictionary of Australian Underworld Slang* of 1993 is the most recent work to deal with the lexis of Australian criminals; however, like Langker's work, it makes a study of an earlier period. Simes' work concerns a reworking of two previously unpublished prison glossaries written in the 1940s. He makes the point that, in actual fact, Australian underworld lexicography was thriving in the mid-twentieth century, just as it was in Britain and the United States, but this material did not reach the public.

The first of the two glossaries treated by Simes was compiled by Ted Hartley, a young conscientious objector imprisoned for his beliefs on two occasions in 1943 and 1944. The second and longer of the glossaries, entitled *The Argot: N.S.W. Prison Slang*, was compiled by an author known only as 'Thirty Five' (after the common practice of referring to an inmate by the last two digits of his or her official prison number), a former school-teacher who had spent at least fifteen years in prison. This latter glossary displays considerable lexicographical competence and survives in two editions, one dated August 1950, and the other dated October 1975 (first half only). Although Baker published a portion of Thirty Five's glossary in *The Australian Language*, the glossary in its entirety had never been examined. Simes writes that: 'It

is the purpose of this book to publish the two glossaries exactly as they were written and, by means of a commentary drawing on all the research that has accumulated since, to place them in a broader lexicographical and historical context.’¹⁵⁰

Although Simes asserts that: ‘I have not conceived my task in the commentary as writing a formal dictionary entry, and indeed have sought brevity and informality,’¹⁵¹ his annotations are very full and useful. The commentary offers further etymological detail, showing which terms are ‘homegrown’ and which have come from elsewhere, charting their change in the process of migration, and providing illustrative quotations. For this supplementary material, Simes draws upon literary sources and from his own files which, particularly in the case of sexual language, are fuller than the printed record. The dictionary is not only historical; the commentary displays the longevity and rate of survival of these terms (many of which are still in use), thus the text also reveals much about the nature and vocabulary of underworld lexis during the later twentieth century. Although the commentary is comprehensive, Simes has been careful to let the glossaries speak for themselves as much as possible, keeping additions or changes to a minimum and implementing these only to clarify any unclear or misleading aspects of the texts.

In addition to the dictionary, Simes also includes a large prefatory section, in which he presents a thorough review of cant literature and lexicography in England, the United States and Australia. In this work Simes has compiled an excellent dictionary that is detailed and professional. His main contribution is that he has filled in the gaps and allowed a more complete view of Australia’s cant tradition.

Overview 1900 – 2000

The period 1900 – 2000 contained several new developments for Australian underworld lexicography. As in other countries, the work produced in the twentieth century focused largely upon the language of prison inmates, although no full-length compilation of prison argot was published until the 1990s. This focus was probably

¹⁵⁰ Simes, x.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, lxxiv.

due to the fact that most authors of this period were either current or ex-prison inmates, for example, Jim McNeil, Neil James, the contributor to *The Australasian Post*, 'Thirty Five' and Ted Hartley.

Most of the records of Australian argot consisted of entries in more general slang dictionaries, as in Baker (1941); small chapters within larger discussions of general slang, as in Baker (1945) and Horndage (1980); examples of argot published in newspapers such as *The Australasian Post* (1960) and the *Sydney Bulletin* (1975); or glossaries appended to literary works, as with McNeil (1973). The glossaries themselves were of varying degrees of depth, accuracy and detail. Rhyming slang occurred commonly in these glossaries, demonstrating a distinct Australian character from the early 1970s, as seen in McNeil's list.

Plagiarism did not occur amongst Australian underworld lexicographers during the twentieth century, but there were several instances of citing or acknowledged borrowing; for example, Baker drew upon Thirty Five's glossary (1950); Simes (1993) also drew upon this glossary, as well as Ted Hartley's (1943-1944); Partridge (1949) drew upon Baker (1945); Horndage discussed Vaux (1812, 1819), the contributor to *The Australasian Post* (1960) and James (1975); and Ransom (1988) incorporated material from most of these previous works. From 1980 onwards, Australian underworld lexicography consisted of commentaries upon existing work, as with Horndage and Ransom; a compilation and reworking of previously unpublished work, as with Simes; or a collection and cataloguing of historical terminology found in numerous discrete sources, as with Langker (1980, 1981). Although these recent researchers made a determined effort to address the deficit of literature upon the early and middle periods of the Australian canting tradition, it would be useful to see some work undertaken on contemporary Australian argot.

NEW ZEALAND

Records of New Zealand Canting Language 1930 – 2000

The works discussed in this section are: Nelson Baylis' letter to Eric Partridge (1932); Sidney J. Baker's *New Zealand Slang: A Dictionary of Colloquialisms* (1941); Greg Newbold's 'The Social Organization of Prisons' (1978) and *The Big Huey* (1982); Donald MacKenzie's *While We Have Prisons* (1980); Hilary Beaton's *Outside In* (1984); Harry Orsman's *Dictionary of New Zealand English* (1997); Diana Looser's 'Bonds and Barriers: A Study of Language in a New Zealand Prison' (1997); Orsman's *Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang* (1999); and Looser's 'Boob Jargon: The Language of a Women's Prison' (1999), 'Investigating Boobslang' (1999) and 'Boobslang and Kiwi Culture: The Oral Communication of Prison Inmates' (2000).

In New Zealand, records for cant begin very late, dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. These late nineteenth and early twentieth century 'records' were minimal, consisting of citations for a few individual items, appearing occasionally in newspaper or magazine articles. Very little exists in terms of recorded underworld and prison language in New Zealand, being restricted to a handful of sources. Right from the beginning, compilers of New Zealand argot have not focused upon the language of the free underworld; that is, we do not have a proliferation of literature concerning the language of tramps and other wandering rogues, black marketeers and swindlers as occurs in Britain and the United States, and most of the texts and accompanying glossaries are largely prison-specific.

Several New Zealand authors have used prison argot in their novels, autobiographies, short stories, plays and poems, for example: Ian Hamilton, Bill Payne, Bruce Stewart, Frank Sargeson, John Justin, James K. Baxter and Alan Duff. However, as these authors do not provide glossaries, their texts have some lexical interest, but play no significant part in the development of cant lexicography in this country. Because we have no full-length or stand-alone dictionaries of prison argot, the remaining works consist of brief glossaries accompanying fuller texts not necessarily related to language, or argot terms embedded within larger, more general dictionaries.

Some of the earliest published examples of prison argot in New Zealand occur in a letter to Eric Partridge from one Nelson Baylis. The letter, sent in 1932, lists several argot terms in current use in the early 1930s, for example: *blue* = a court summons,

and *demon* = a detective. Partridge cites these terms in his *Dictionary of the Underworld* (1949).

The first New Zealand dictionary to make mention of New Zealand argot was Sidney J. Baker's *New Zealand Slang: A Dictionary of Colloquialisms*, which appeared in 1941. Baker writes that: 'We have also acquired some underworld slang of our own: *blow a tank*, to break open a safe with explosive,'¹⁵² and he also cites the term *shelfer* = a police informer. These references are minimal, however, and appear in a popular dictionary not devoted to language of the underworld. This dictionary is much like his *Dictionary of Australian Slang* already discussed, in terms of its target audience, lexicographical conventions and the quality of its material.

After Baker's dictionary, it was not until the late 1970s that a glossary of prison argot was compiled in New Zealand, although it remained unpublished. The glossary is an appendix to an MA thesis in Anthropology from Auckland University, entitled 'The Social Organization of Prisons,' written by Greg Newbold and submitted in January 1978. The thesis is a fascinating work, all the more significant because it was the first such work (possibly still the only such work) to have been produced by a prison inmate, wholly within prison confines. Newbold wrote the thesis while he was incarcerated in the maximum-security division of Paremoremo (Auckland Regional) Prison, serving a seven-and-a-half year sentence for drug-dealing. The thesis itself explores the organisational dynamics of total institutions, particularly the internal organisation of Paremoremo Prison. The research is scholarly and in-depth and draws upon material contributed by Newbold's fellow inmates, as well as from authoritative sociological texts.

Newbold uses much prison argot in the body of the thesis: in the quotations from and essays written by fellow Paremoremo inmates, and in his own examples and anecdotes. He includes a section entitled 'Roles,' in which he investigates and details the informal social structure amongst inmates, where inmates are categorised and labelled according to their attributes. Newbold discusses, for example, the *cat* and the *hock* = types of homosexuals; the *standover merchant* = a bully, one who uses

¹⁵² S. J. Baker. *New Zealand Slang: A Dictionary of Colloquialisms* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1941) 52.

intimidating tactics to acquire goods or services; the *forty-percenter* = an idiot, one who is mentally deficient or unstable; the *policeman* or *nark* = an informer; the *weak mug*, the *germ* and the *flea* = an annoying or contemptible person, an ingrate; and the *tealeaf* = one who steals from his fellow inmates.

Naturally, the glossary itself is of greatest lexical interest, and is in line with the trend in criminal justice publications of attaching an explanatory list of words to a text not primarily associated with language, as seen with Clemmer's, Ragen's and Giallombardo's work in the United States. Newbold's glossary, 'Argot Terms in Common Usage at Paremoremo,' defines many of the terms used in the text, as well as several others popular in the prison at the time, and lists about 230 headwords with a total of about 285 entries. The terms cover a wide range of subject areas and include many previously unrecorded words and expressions. The glossary is characterised by a rich variety of rhyming slang terminology. Although the combination of Newbold's academic training and his experience as a criminal is helpful, he is a sociologist and a criminologist, not a sociolinguist or a lexicographer, and so the lexicographical quality of the glossary is fairly basic; his definitions are brief, sometimes consisting only of a single synonym, and there is no attempt at etymology.

This glossary appeared with some variation as an appendix to Newbold's book, *The Big Huey*, published five years later in 1982. *The Big Huey* is Newbold's autobiography, relating his experience of the five years he spent in Mount Eden, Paremoremo and Hautu Prisons from 1975 to 1980. This book is a popular work, designed for a general audience, and is entertaining, insightful and still highly topical twenty years after its publication. Newbold makes use of prison argot to a large degree in the text, and he acknowledges this usage and the fact that his readers may need a glossary to decipher his book, as he writes:

Throughout the text I have made free use of 'boob' jargon; the jargon of the jail. Many of the terms involved in this language are specific only to prisons and criminal subcultures, and will be unfamiliar to the person on the street. Accordingly, I have compiled a full glossary of prison terms (explaining, where possible, word origins) and have appended them to the script.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ G. Newbold. *The Big Huey: An Inmate's Candid Account of Five Years Inside New Zealand Prisons* (Auckland: William Collins, 1982) 8.

Newbold points out that prison argot is subject to constant change and growth, and consequently, there is a huge variety of terminology that cannot be accounted for completely. He does however, indicate the significance of his glossary, writing that: 'the glossary attached to this book consists of about 300 of the most commonly-used expressions. It is, to my knowledge, the most complete and accurate collection of New Zealand prison slang ever compiled.'¹⁵⁴

There are several discernible differences between the 1982 glossary and the 1978 version. Firstly, the 1982 version includes more terminology, with about 290 headwords, incorporating about 310 entries. Some of the extra terms included in the 1982 glossary include more recent drug terminology, such as a *buddha stick* = imported marijuana bound to a splinter of bamboo. Other new inclusions are *sky rocket* = pocket; *truck driver* = a prison medical officer; and *judas hole* = an inspection hole in a cell door. The 1982 glossary is entitled, 'A Glossary of Argot Terms Commonly Used in New Zealand Prisons,' so possibly incorporates terms that Newbold encountered in other prisons after leaving Paremoremo. Interestingly, however, some terms listed in the 1978 glossary are left out of the 1982 version. These exclusions tend to be tougher and more sexually explicit, and were perhaps not deemed suitable for a mainstream readership; for example, the term *boyfucker* = a homosexual paedophile, is omitted, as is *eight-day-clock* = a penis (rhyming slang for 'cock') and *tunnel cunt (or T.C.)* = an unfaithful wife, a harlot. This last term appears in the 1982 version only in the abbreviated form, *T.C.*, with a more general definition of 'unfaithful woman, harlot,' and no further exemplification (a decision which has left subsequent lexicographers mystified as to what the initials have stood for). Other terms omitted from the 1982 text, however, are seemingly innocuous; for example: *King Billy* = silly; *blow arse* = a braggart, vocal person; and *hammer and tack* = back; and there is no apparent reason for their exclusion. Possibly the terms are excluded because they are not unique to New Zealand, but this is also true of several other terms that remain in the 1982 glossary.

Newbold has also corrected minor errors that occur in the 1978 glossary. He amends the spelling of some terms, for example, *castor* reappears as *caster* and *mulluck* is

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

rectified as *mullock*; and improves the labelling and definition of terms, fixing entries where a term has been labelled as one part of speech and defined as another. For example, the 1978 entry, '*track* (vb) Act of smuggling contraband into and out of prison' appears in 1982 as '*track* (v) Smuggle contraband into and out of prison.' Some definitions from the thesis are simplified and made less academic, some have been refined, and others have been expanded to provide more information. As part of these revisions, Newbold traces the origins of some of the terms, using material taken chiefly from Partridge's *Dictionary of the Underworld* and *Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, which he acknowledges.

One minor problem with the 1982 text is that several terms that may be identified as prison argot appear in the book but do not appear in the glossary; however, Newbold writes that his list is not exhaustive, nor is it intended to be. Another aspect which is interesting to note is the lack of Māori terminology in the glossary. Although the 1982 text represents the most comprehensive list of New Zealand prison argot until that date and offers the first proper view of a New Zealand variety of underworld language, the only word of an indigenous nature is *Wow* for a mental asylum, which derives from an Anglicised mispronunciation of the Māori 'Whau,' the name of the Auckland river next to which Oakley Mental Hospital (closed down August 1 1987)¹⁵⁵ was situated. It cannot be denied, however, that Newbold's work constitutes a major contribution to the corpus of recorded New Zealand cant terminology and to the development of cant lexicography in this country.

Throughout the 1980s, smaller glossaries were published, which were not of great lexical significance, but introduced new words and expressions. One such glossary featured in Donald MacKenzie's book, *While We Have Prisons*, published in 1980. MacKenzie worked for 10 years at Auckland's Mount Eden Prison as a welfare officer, parole officer and prison psychologist, and wrote about his experiences and ideas regarding the prison system. MacKenzie's 'Lag's Lexicon' at the back of the book lists 140 lexical items. The list is helpful, but it includes many items that would now be considered street slang, such as: *wank* = to masturbate; *cop* = a policeman; *drag* = a male homosexual dressed in women's clothing; and *fag* = a cigarette;

¹⁵⁵ New Zealand Health Agency Facilities, including addresses and dates of opening/closure. 24 November 2000. <<http://www.nzhis.govt.nz/haf.html>>.

however, as many underworld terms gradually make their way into common usage, this is a criticism that may be applied (not necessarily fairly) to any underworld lexicon of more than a few years' standing.

Like Jim McNeil, Hilary Beaton attaches a glossary of prison argot to her play, *Outside In*, first performed in Auckland in 1982 and published in 1984. The material for the play came from Beaton's observations during visits as an actress and tutor to both men's and women's prisons and borstals, and from her discussions with social workers, the Justice Department and inmates.¹⁵⁶ *Outside In* concerns the lives of seven female prison inmates and their relationships over a period of months. The list of 53 prison-related words and expressions includes some previously unrecorded terminology; because it focuses on the language of female inmates, it adds a new dimension to the accruing corpus of New Zealand prison argot.

One more recent study is documented in Diana Looser's article 'Bonds and Barriers: The Language of a New Zealand Prison' published in the *New Zealand English Journal* in 1997. This article records the results of a study undertaken at Rolleston Prison in Canterbury in September 1996 (where Looser interviewed a small sample of inmates from two prison units) and examines the ways in which the use of argot amongst prison inmates constructs a series of social, emotional and psychological bonds and barriers for both inmates and 'outsiders.' This is the first work to attempt any sociolinguistic analysis of New Zealand prison argot. Of most relevance to this discussion is the article's collection of about 200 prison argot terms and expressions (basically an updated version of Newbold's glossary), which includes some previously unrecorded lexical items, some new words for existing definitions, and some new or additional definitions for existing words. The words are presented as two lists comparing the vocabularies of two inmates in different units. The article also includes a comparison between the meanings of selected terms in 1980 and in 1996, displaying the evolution of the language to incorporate new influences and trends, one notable example being the rise of the skinhead movement in New Zealand.

¹⁵⁶ Sebastian Black in the foreword to H. Beaton. *Outside In* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1984) 7.

The Dictionary of New Zealand English (1997) (with its associated archives) is an extremely comprehensive and professional work focusing upon all aspects of New Zealand lexis, and it contains the fullest collection of prison argot words and expressions produced so far. Edited by Harry Orsman, the dictionary cites 103 prison-oriented terms, and more may be found and labelled as satellite terms indicative of closely related criminal subcultures. As Orsman published only a quarter of the material he gathered, a further 272 terms are recorded online in the archive of the New Zealand Dictionary Centre, totalling 375 prison words and expressions. Orsman includes all of Newbold's, MacKenzie's and Beaton's lists, together with other terms collected from various literary sources. The terms are listed with full lexicographical competence, featuring details of origins, etymologies, and illustrative quotations. The inclusion of argot terminology in such a dictionary has helped to promote prison argot in New Zealand not only as a subject worthy of attention, but as a distinctive New Zealand variety.

Orsman followed his 1997 dictionary with the more popular *Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang* in 1999. This dictionary includes some material taken from the *Dictionary of New Zealand English*, but also incorporates new material contained in the archive and taken from works published since the compilation of the 1997 work; for example, Looser's lists of Rolleston prison inmates' usage. Here, Orsman is concerned with wide coverage of slang used more recently in New Zealand, rather than providing his readers with a complete historical survey:

This *Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang* captures the distinctive informal vocabulary of New Zealanders since the Second World War, say from 1940. ... Thus the 'Slang' of the title is shorthand for a whole range of informal or colloquial usage of various kinds... from the particular jargon of prison inmates and skateboarders to the universal gems found in all good New Zealand intercourse.¹⁵⁷

The *Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang* is less academic and more accessible than the *Dictionary of New Zealand English*, as Orsman writes: '*Modern New Zealand Slang* presents its material with the maximum of scholarship and the minimum of intrusive academic apparatus.'¹⁵⁸ Each term is identified with the date of first record, and with labels such as 'obsolete,' 'old-fashioned,' 'WW2,' 'formerly' and 'Hist.' (in historical use), to give readers an idea of the range of use of each word

¹⁵⁷ H Orsman. *A Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang* (Auckland: Oxford, 1999) v.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, vi.

or expression. Where possible, Orsman also offers etymologies and provides example sentences. This dictionary is a most interesting and entertaining work, as well as a very useful resource.

Looser published a further article in the *New Zealand English Journal* in 1999. 'Boob Jargon: The Language of a Women's Prison' is the first sociolinguistic study of the language of a women's prison in New Zealand and describes the argot gathered from six inmates at Christchurch Women's Prison during September 1997. The first part of the article provides a sociolinguistic analysis of the women's language, including a discussion of the ways in which prison argot may be used to socially construct an inmate in the prison environment, and a description of the general origins of the argot terms used by the women. The second part of the article comprises a glossary of about 450 argot terms, which is the longest list of women's prison language yet compiled in New Zealand.

Looser's article, 'Investigating Boobslang,' which appeared in *NZWords* in 1999, does not provide a list of prison argot, but bases its discussion around a number of previously unrecorded terms mentioned in the text. Looser identifies the main semantic categories of New Zealand prison argot and reveals the basic origins of some of the argot terms. Significantly, it is in this article that the term *boobslang* first appears as the name currently used by inmates for their distinctive criminal argot spoken in New Zealand.¹⁵⁹ The term was encountered during an interview with an inmate at Paparua (Christchurch Men's) Prison and subsequent research at Paparua and in other New Zealand prisons found that the term was widely known and used.

The most recent discussion of prison argot in New Zealand is 'Boobslang and Kiwi Culture: the Oral Communication of New Zealand Prison Inmates,' which Diana Looser published in *Rostra: The Journal of the Speech Communication Association of New Zealand* in December 2000. As with the preceding article, no list of boobslang is appended, but about 100 previously unrecorded items from the late stages of Looser's doctoral research are included and discussed. As the target audience for this article is not university academics but speech communication professionals, Looser explains

¹⁵⁹ Newbold records the term *boob jargon* in *The Big Huey* (1982).

briefly the sociolinguistic background to boobslang but argues, in the main, for a distinct variety of New Zealand prison argot, which reflects the unique position that New Zealand occupies/has occupied in the world geographically, culturally and historically. Looser lists the chief influences upon New Zealand culture and its boobslang as British, American, Australian and Māori, which is significant, as this is the first article to acknowledge Māori terminology as an integral and characteristic component of New Zealand prison argot.

Overview 1930 – 2000

The period 1930 – 2000 covers the entire history of underworld lexicography in New Zealand. Because most records occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, their focus has been largely prison-specific. Although New Zealand prison argot contains terminology from other underworld varieties (British, American and Australian), records have always shown it to possess unique features. No full-length dictionary of prison argot has been produced in New Zealand; the records to date comprise short glossaries appended to theses, plays and novels, or various terms embedded within larger dictionaries. Many of these works have displayed basic lexicographical conventions; however, Orsman's dictionaries (1997, 1999) and Looser's work (1997, 1999a, 1999b, 2000) have contained more detailed entries, along with discussions of lexicological and sociolinguistic aspects of the argot.

Studies of New Zealand prison argot have been undertaken by people from a variety of social and academic backgrounds, including: professional lexicographers (Baker and Orsman), a sociologist and (ex-)prison inmate (Newbold 1978, 1982), a prison psychologist and welfare officer (MacKenzie 1980), a tutor and playwright (Beaton 1984), and a sociolinguist (Looser). Several of these authors drew upon the material of others, for example: Partridge (1949) drew upon Baylis (1932) and Baker (1941); Newbold (1982) drew upon Partridge (1949); Orsman (1997) drew upon MacKenzie (1980), Newbold (1982) and Beaton (1984) as well as several novelists, poets and playwrights; Looser (1997) drew upon Newbold (1978, 1982); and Orsman (1999) drew upon Looser (1997), in addition to others.

Throughout the twentieth century, prison argot has expanded to accommodate changes and developments in the prison and associated subcultures. A recent trend has been the proliferation of drug-related and gang-related terminology. Rhyming slang also has emerged as an important component of New Zealand prison argot, gaining, as in Australia, a New Zealand flavour since the 1970s. It is only in the late 1990s, however, that Māori prison terminology has been recorded, possibly as a result of the Māori cultural renaissance that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s and the increased number of Māori language and culture programmes operating in New Zealand prisons.

Therefore, until now, nothing substantial has been undertaken in the way of studies of the vocabulary and functions of New Zealand prison argot. It is hoped that the following lexicon will go some way towards rectifying this situation.